SYNERGY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 1: NO.4

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE

Xmas Special Edition

XMAS HORROR CINEMA

IRON MAN

H.H.HOLMES:
AMERICA'S FIRST SERIAL KILLER

POULTRYGEIST
NIGHT OF THE CHICKEN DEAD

THINKING TIME
FREETHOUGHT, MYTHBUSTING EXECUTIONS AND WAR

WORLD CINEMA

PACKED WITH REVIEWS!
BOOKS, MAGAZINES, COMICS, ART, DVDS, MUSIC, DOCOS, TOYS AND COLLECTIBLES....

HORROR
CULT
MUSIC
ART-HOUSE
FICTION
COLLECTIBLES
WORLD CINEMA
FREE SPEECH
DOCOS
COMICS

SYNERGY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 1: NO.4

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE

Xmas Special Edition

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THINKING TIME

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COMICS AND GRAPHIC ART
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REGIONS

Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions. The R description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

Blu Ray: We only review All Region and Region B titles.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is blu-ray.com, it includes of lots details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

Web: http://www.blu-ray.com

While we review the DVD that has been supplied to us (from whatever region), there may be other editions of the film. Since we are a genre based magazine, the range of titles reviewed will always come from all around the globe.

For international films from the US there are many suppliers including www.amazon.com.

For international films from the UK there are many suppliers including www.amazon.co.uk.

For rare Asian titles we recommend Asian Cult DVD (http://asiancult.com)

For other rare titles we recommend Diabolik DVD (http://www.diabolikdvd.com).

There are a wide variety of retail outlets in Australia including Ezydvd (http://www.ezydvd.com.au)

REVIEWERS

Synergy has various staff reviewers—we also have a number of freelance reviewers who regularly supply us reviews.

We do not list names with general staff reviews, features and articles. Reviews by freelance reviewers are marked with the reviewer names. Our primary freelance reviewers are Bob Estreich, Jeremy Kong and Michelle Taylor.

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SEASONS GREETINGS!

Well, 2008 has come to an end and what a year has it been. The US economy collapsing and taking the world with it, the US election being the media circus it always is and Hollywood becoming more and more predictable until it becomes a parody of itself.

For the world of Genre and Indie film it has been a great year with lots of high quality Indie product from both major distributors such as Madman, Siren, Umbrella, Hopscotch, Kojo Pictures and Accent (in Australia) and films such as Severin, Redemption and others internationally.

And that doesn't include all the great small firms and first time directors and producers who have produced truly noteworthy Indie releases.

Synergy has produced four large issues and we hope to move to around six next year. The print edition is selling well and the digital edition is reaching a large audience, bringing information on new and exciting products to a audience hungry for alternatives to bland mainstream entertainment.

There is a world of cinema out there if people will only look and I find myself honored by the films that filmmakers and distributors share with us for myself and our team to review.

I applaud the Indie filmmakers who struggle against all odds to make the films they do and will continue to give them coverage in 2009 in our pages.

We look forward to sharing 2009 with you...

NEWS IN BRIEF

The Ultimate Guitar Book on its Way

Rock author Joel McIver's twelfth book, The 100 Greatest Metal Guitarists, will be published globally in January 2009 by Jawbone Press, the world's leading publisher of guitar titles. Featuring a foreword by Glen Benton of Deicide, the book takes the reader in reverse order from No. 100 to No. 1, the greatest metal guitarist of all time. McIver — a regular contributor to Total Guitar magazine, the biggest guitar magazine in Europe — based his selection on the technical ability and historical significance of each player and adds that all generations of metal are covered in the book, with the oldest guitarist aged 61 and the youngest a mere 26.

McIver says, "The idea for this book came to me a couple of years ago after I read a list of the supposed 100 best metal guitarists of all time in a popular guitar magazine that should really know better. The list contained all these non-metal guitarists like Neil Young and Kurt Cobain, so I thought, 'Screw this!' and wrote my own list, which became an 80,000-word book. The 100 Greatest Metal Guitarists features musicians from heavy metal, thrash metal, death metal, black metal, power metal, doom metal and grind core bands and that's it!"

Web: http://www.jawbonepress.com

Taschen releases The Ingmar Bergman Archives

The complete works of Ingmar Bergman: an homage to one of the most esteemed film and theatre artists of all time, began in cooperation with Bergman himself and made with full access to his archives.

Since 1957, when he released The Seventh Seal and Wild Strawberries, Ingmar Bergman has been one of the leading figures in international cinema. In a career that spanned 60 years, he wrote, produced, and directed 50 films that defined how we see ourselves and how we interact with the people we love, in films like Persona, Scenes from a Marriage, and Fanny and Alexander.

Before his death in 2007, Bergman gave TASCHEN and the Swedish publishing house Max Ström complete access to his archives at The Bergman Foundation, and permission to reprint his writings and interviews, many of which have never been seen outside of Sweden. Picture researcher Bengt Wanselius, who was Bergman's photographer for 20 years, scoured photo archives all over Sweden, discovered previously unseen images from Bergman's films, and selected unpublished images from the personal archives of many photographers. Text editor Paul Duncan gathered a team of Bergman experts as contributing editors—Peter Cowie and Bengt Forslund (for film/TV), and Ulla Åberg & Birgitta Steene (for theatre)—who have researched and written a narrative that, for the first time, will combine all of Bergman's working life in film and theatre. Such is the depth of Bergman's writings that most of the story is told in his own words.

This book also features a new introduction by Bergman's close friend, actor and collaborator Erland Josephson, as well as a DVD full of rare and previously unseen material, and an original film strip from Fanny and Alexander.

The publishers have been given complete access to the files and archives of the Swedish Film Institute, Svensk Filmindustri, Sveriges Television, and the Royal Dramatic Theatre, as well as many other institutions, publishers, and newspapers, making this not only the most complete book ever published on Ingmar Bergman, but also about an individual director.

Within the Woods
New Horror Film on the Way

Website:
http://www.withinthewoodsthefilm.co.uk/

Youtube:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Pqleo1lxHM

Within the Woods is a stark, modern day Horror film written, directed and filmed by Luke Massey. It's a classic low budget 70's horror film, think "Evil Dead" meets "Night of the Living Dead" with the production values of Robert Rodriguez's debut "El Mariachi" or Peter Jackson's "Bad Taste". This is not a glamorous Hollywood studio flick, but a visceral, plot driven horror shot using novel filming, lighting and makeup effects techniques to tell the story of a broken family struggling to keep things together while facing real terror.

The film is set a few days from now, when a mutated strain of avian influenza is about to affect two groups of young adults. Featuring a cast and crew from a variety of backgrounds and filmed entirely in the West Midlands, the film focuses on the unknown potential facing humanity if the H5N1 virus ever crossed over into the human population.

The story takes place over 24 hours and begins with a wild animal smuggler bringing in a rare bird from the Far East and meeting with his contact on the outskirts of the forest. The bird is infected with the mutated strain of H5N1 and passes on the disease when it attacks him. Later on the same day two groups of young adults on separate story arcs heading into an isolated area of woodlands in the heart of the Warwickshire countryside. The first group is four former foster children heading back to the cabin they used to stay in when they were children and hoping to repair their broken family ties. The second group are eco protestors looking to try and stop the proposed redevelopment of the same woodlands by a building company. As the night progresses they encounter the first victims and start the fight for their lives."

Within The Woods is a horrific and violent horror story about real characters put in an unreal situation. At its core, is not your usual horror story line, but rather a story with a focus on a broken foster family reunited after several years and forced to confront a difficult past.

Cornered: Coming Soon from MAZEfilms
Web: http://www.corneredmovie.com

MAZEfilms announced today its first horror film "CORNERED!" is ready for the market.

"First and foremost, viewers must be able to enjoy a movie, regardless of gore or dark undertones," explained Managing Director Daniel Maze, MAZEfilms, Inc. "That's why we added unexpected humor to 'CORNERED!' and married it with a strong plot."

The horror movie features a serial killer, who targets LA convenience stores, torturing and murdering victims in creative ways -- and then stealing surveillance tapes as trophies.

In the movie, everyone is talking about the sensational series of crimes. At a downtown liquor store, a beer delivery man, MORTY (Steve Guttenberg: "Cocoon," "Police Academy," "3 Men and a Baby"), his motley friends and the store owner, STEVE (Eduardo Garcia: "No Country for Old Men"), fantasize about catching the killer -- and snagging a $500,000 reward.

"It was fun, creative and it was something I got to do that I have never done before," said Actor Steve Guttenberg, who stars as MORTY. "I'm happy to be here and make it work."

"Everything has to start with a good script, and we have a good script," said Actor Eduardo Garcia, who plays Steve in the movie.

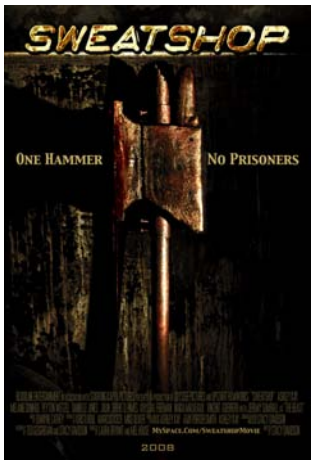
Confident that the liquor store is safe and secure, Steve and his poker buddies -- Jimmy (James Duval: "Donnie Darko") Jess (Elizabeth Nicole: "7th Heaven"), Donny (Peter Story: "CSI") and Monda (Ellia English: "Good Luck Chuck,"), lock themselves in and settle down for their nightly game.

A suspenseful "who-done-it" with a refreshing spin on the classic horror film, '*CORNERED!*' will have you squirming.

Sweatshop

Sweatshop is the second film directed by Stacy Davidson after the highly successful Domain of the Dead. It is slated for a mid-2009 release and will offer a very modern take on the slasher genre. It is an ultra-violent horror film set within America's industrial raver subculture. According to the director... "Sweatshop is my chance to delve right into the sub-genre that started with movies like Psycho, Black Christmas, Alice, Sweet Alice and Halloween, and grew to outrageous levels of thrills, chills and ruby red splatterage with "dozen kids in a blender" flicks like Friday the 13th, Prom Night, Terror Train, The Prowler, and two of my favorite slasher films of all time: My Bloody Valentine and The Burning".

The plot to Sweatshop offers a superb opportunity for suspense, horror and gore. Charlie (Ashley Kay of *Domain of the Damned*) has invited her friends to a labyrinthine warehouse to help her set up for an impromptu rave, unaware that the building is home to an evil presence known only as The Beast (portrayed by hulking newcomer Jeremy Sumrall). This enormous, bloodthirsty ghoul hides behind a massive welder's mask and brandishes a gargantuan foundry hammer, quickly making short work of the oversexed kids and carving a gory swath through their ill-advised plans.



Rounding out *Sweatshop*'s ensemble cast are *Closet Space*'s Peyton Wetzel, Melanie Donihoo, and Danielle Jones; *Domain of the Damned* alumni Naika Malveaux, Krystal Freeman, and Brent D. Himes (also of *Mr. Hell*); *Spirit Camp*'s Julin; and newcomer Vincent Guerrero. The film's numerous gruesome special effects are courtesy of Kristi Boul (*Walking Distance*), Mike Oliver (*Domain of the Damned*), and F/X guru Marcus Koch (*100 Tears*).

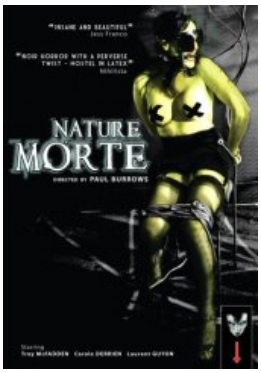
The new "retro" red-band trailer will debut exclusively at www.fangoria.com. A stunning high definition version, with additional R-rated shots, will be available for a limited time at the Odyssee Pictures website starting one week after its debut at Fangoria.

Sweatshop MySpace Page
http://www.myspace.com/sweatshopmovie

Odyssee Pictures
http://www.odysseepictures/sweatshop

COMPETITIONS

Nature Morte Giveaway



We are lucky enough to have copies of Nature Morte to giveaway. A superb film (read our review this issue).

This is an English all region PAL DVD.

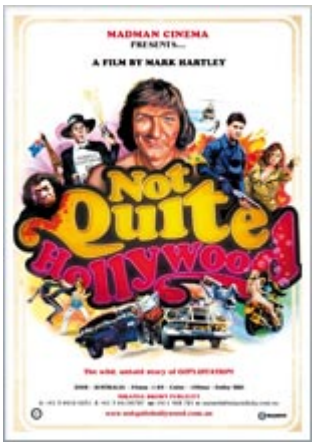
The giveaway is open until December 31st.

Send an email to the below email with Nature Morte in the title and your name and email:

promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Not Quite Hollywood

The Wild, Untold Story of Ozploitation Cinema



Jam packed full of outrageous anecdotes, lessons in maverick filmmaking, a smattering of international names (including 'Ozploitation' devotee Quentin Tarantino) and a genuine, infectious love of Aussie movies, NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD is a fast moving journey through Australian genre cinema of the '70s and early '80s - a forgotten cinematic era unashamedly packed full of pubes, boobs, tubes... and kung fu.

Thanks to Madman Entertainment, we are lucky to have some copies to give away.

Send an email to the below email with NQH in the title and your name and email:

promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

TMNT have a certain nostalgic quality for those of a certain age and now there is a new TMNT toy.

The all new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Shell Shifters are motorized battle machines which mutant-morph from cool giant robots into awesome attack vehicles.

Totally decked out, each Shell Shifter has real spinning and shooting weapons plus shape-shifting ability. And the battery powered mutant motor is designed for treading and tearing up really tough terrain, they are solidly built and will satisfy the most demanding of kid (or those eternal youngsters among us who love these strange toys !)

Each action packed battle machine comes with a TMNT action figurine - choose your favourite character, Donatello, Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael, or collect them all!

They are sold by Funtastic in Australia and retail for around $52.95.

Like to win one ?

We have a couple to giveaway.

Send an email with TMNT in the subject line and your details to:

promotions@synergy-magazine.com

Xmas Survival Kit !

I am not a Xmas person and that is an understatement. I never liked Xmas, even when I was a child. The family get-togethers where long lost relatives pretend to like each other and get drunk as soon as possible to make it through the day. The ridiculous hot dinners in the middle of summer (hint ! Synergy is in Australia!), large turkeys filled with stuffing and covered in flies. Second hand Xmas decorations, tinsel and window displays that looking so sickly sweet and sentimental you want to vomit. Then there is the crass commercialism, businesses trying so hard to be friendly as they rip you off blind. People in the street say “Merry Christmas” while they are thinking of stabbing you in the back.

Okay, I may sound a little paranoid and misanthropic, but Xmas is a drag and a revolting period of the year. Everything grinds to a halt because of the supposed birth of a Jewish revolutionary some two thousand years ago. It doesn’t matter that the vast flood of evidence suggests he didn’t even exist, no—we need to celebrate. Then there is Santa Claus, a left over from pagan times, now while I can somewhat emphasize with the good old pagan roots of Xmas originally the orgiastic celebration of Saturnalia, Santa has been sanitized into a strange old man who delivers presents to Children, it seems the old randy horned god of Winter has been long forgotten and replaced with an inane baby.

So I would like to offer a survival kit for Xmas, a selection of DVDs you need to watch to survive the season...

Bad Santa 2003

A perversely funny Xmas comedy starring Bob Thornton. Thornton plays a hard-drinking, chain-smoking, foul-mouthed sex addicted safe-cracker who targets a different department store every holiday season to make a quick buck. He cases each store with his dwarf elf-partner Marcus (Tony Cox). This is an especially offensive and obnoxiously fun Xmas story with a touch of pathos but lots of filth! It is incredibly politically incorrect included a memorable scene when the store manage Chipeska (John Ritter) hears Willie having anal sex with an overweight woman in a changing room in the mall and tries to fire him. However, Willie and Marcus threaten to sue him for discrimination against African-American "little people" like Marcus if they are fired, and Chipeska is forced to keep them on staff !

It received loads of bad press and floods of complaints from offended parents and so obviously is a true pleasure to share with loved ones. This is the only nasty Xmas comedy on my recommended list, so get yourself a copy.

Black Christmas also known as Silent Night, Evil Night – released in 1974.

Black Christmas is a Canadian Slasher classic which has developed a massive cult following. A twisted killer hides in the attic of a sorority and after making lewd phone calls goes on a killing spree. It is a very earlier slasher and tends to create a mood through plot and ambiance rather than through more and still has a good punch years later.

It was remade in 2006 but stick with the original. A nice special edition of the original is available in the US.

Christmas Evil also known as Terror in Toyland 1980.

Christmas Evil is a marvellous celebration of the commercialism of Xmas. Harry Spaulding, is a foreman at the Jolly Dream Toy Factory, he has been obsessed with Xmas since he witnessed his father (who he believed to be the "real" Santa) performing oral sex on his mother, while dressed in a Father Christmas outfit !

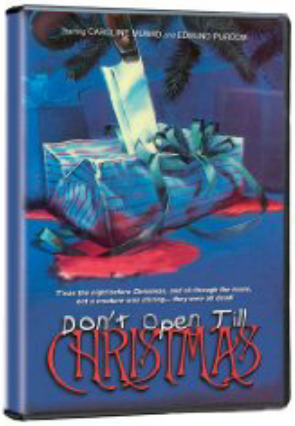
He spends all his lonely life living out his obsession with Xmas and making children's toys.

One special season he decides to dress up as Santa Claus and deliver toys to needy children who are staying in a local hospital. It seems he has kept a record of how the children and locals have behaved throughout the year and look out those who have been naughty !

I especially like John Water's comments on this film ".."the best seasonal film of all time. I wish I had kids. I'd make them watch it every year and, if they didn't like it, they'd be punished!"

Synapse films have released a great special edition in the US.

Don't Open Till Christmas (1984)



"t'was the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring...they were all dead! "

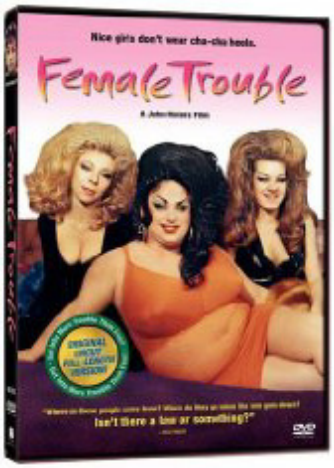
A murderer is running loose through the streets of London, hunting down anyone dressed as Santa and killing or disfiguring them all in different and extremely violent ways ranging from a castration to spearing and burning.

It seems the killer saw his mother killed by a man dressed as Santa and is now out for revenge !

Inspector Harris has decided to take on the unenviable task of tracking down the psychopath, but he's going to have his work cut out for him. Only the suspicious reporter, Giles, seems to offer the Inspector any promising leads.

A nice English twist on the Xmas tale.

Female Trouble (1975)
John Waters



Female Trouble is not really a Xmas film but includes such a startling Xmas scene it is worth including. Female Waters is a John Waters film starring Divine.

In this classic scene Divine as Dawn Davenport has her eyes on Cha Cha heels for Xmas but her conservative parents have something more fitting a girl of good breeding.

After the poor girl is forced to sing Xmas hymns with her parents, she receives a pair of nice "shoes" and all hell breaks loose. She stamps on their Xmas gifts, knocks the Xmas tree to the ground and screams "fuck you" and "fuck" Christmas" and "I hate Xmas" as she runs from the house to the tune of jingle bells. She is picked up by a dirty truck driver and taken to a remote spot where they make out.

The trucker is greasy, dirty and has skid marks on his undies. Amazingly, Glenn Milstead (Divine's real life persona) plays both roles, I think this is the only cinematic presentation of how to truly fuck yourself.

Santa Slay (2004)

In the Xmas Eve of 2005, Santa Claus (Bill Goldberg) arrives in Hell Township and starts killing the locals.

The opening scene when Santa comes down the chimney and slaughters the whole loud mouthed family is one of the more memorable in all Christmas entertainment !

I have always disliked Fran Drescher (I hated the Nanny) and the way in which she is despatched is truly impressive, heads are smashed and carving knifes are placed in all manner of locations. The sheer ferocity in which evil Santa deals with the family has to be seen to be believed. I must admit the rest of the film has trouble living up to the first fifteen minutes with Santa coming down the chimney and "cleaning up" the family, but it is still good fun !

The plot is well, plan weird, one of the local teens Nicholas Yuleson finds that his grandfather is actually an angel that defeated the devil's son in a bet, and Satan's kid has spent the last one thousand years in penance playing good Santa giving toys to children. Now that the bet is over, the gloves are off and Santa wants revenge. Nicholas and his girlfriend Mary Mackenzie must escape from the crazed Santa and find a way to stop him before the end of Xmas.

This is bizarre mixture of Xmas story and supernatural fantasy with some astounding bloodshed !

Santa Claus never looked so mean !

Silent Night, Bloody Night (1974)

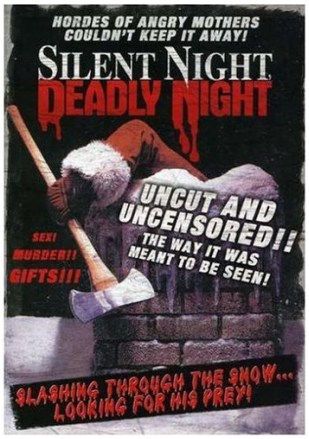
Wilford Butler is not a healthy man. He rapes his daughter, becomes deranged with guilt and so turns his home into a mental institution. However, when he sees that the staff and doctors are living it up rather than helping the patients, he sets them all free and they kill the staff and sadly his daughter as well.

The town believes that Wilford has died, but no one is really sure, in any event the institution is closed down and papers are served and the house is left to go to ruin.

A few years later, Jeffrey finally decides to sell this grandfather's house. But not before he finds his granddaddy's diary and learns his is the child of his fathers rape and the truth about the house.

Strangely, the town's people, including the Mayor, have mixed feelings about selling the place. What's the twist ? Well the spoiler is that the Mayor and townspeople are the ex patients of the institution who killed the staff and escaped !

Silent Night Deadly Night Parts I and II 1984 and 1987



Silent Night, Deadly Night is the classic anti Xmas film. A young boy watches his parents brutally slaughtered by a thief in a Santa suit. He spends his lonely youth in an orphanage, run a predictably disturbed Mother Superior (aren't they all ?)

When he becomes a teen, he gets a job at a local store where he finally snaps when he is forced to play Santa. He then goes on a killing spree that winds its way back to the orphanage.

It caused outrage when it was released and was constantly protested by shocked and horrified mothers, it was actually pulled from theatrical release in the U.S and only released in a cut form on video.

Part II continues the tale with a long recap of the first film which nearly takes up half the second movie, I kid you not. We are then introduced to Billy's brother, Ricky who is just as much as a psycho as Billy.

As one might expect Ricky was just as damaged by his family's death and now add to this his demented brother's rampage and demise and he is a real time bomb.

All it took Ricky's girlfriend's ex-boyfriend to set off Ricky's fury and then, of course, he dons a Santa suit and heads off with a axe !

Treevenge (Short Film 2008)

Treevenge is a unique Xmas Tree revenge film! It opens with redneck hicks of clearly inbred stock ravaging a plantation for Xmas Tree stock. As they do the trees cry and scream, they sound like sad little chipmunks !

It is superbly outrageous to see these trees fighting to survive and going into shock as they are placed in the van to go to the retail store, we have poor seedlings crying for their parents to protect them !

The foresters are stereotypical monsters as are the terribly evil and wicked Xmas tree sellers who seem to have glee in their eyes as they cut and main the trees ready for consumption. Insult is added to injury when a majestic tree is bought by a horrid middle class family for their "too good to be true" Xmas celebration.

The family is so sickly sweet, so sentimental, so revolting you just can't wait for the carnage to start. You see the whole film through the eyes of the tree, you feel its pain, its insult as being reduced to a bourgeois ornament, covered in tinsel and topped with a star.

As Xmas day arrives, the father tells the kids "don't worry tear the paper off" (an environmental message here) and the boy receives a little chainsaw. That's about enough for the tree and it goes wild and the family is torn apart.

Eyes are torn out, trees attack with axes, branches go down mouths and a big tree stamps on a baby's head ! It is war between tree and man !!

I will never look at Xmas again the same way. This is a superbly done short, beautifully shot, filled with irony, sarcasm and wit as well as packed with a wicked sense of humour and some great gore !!

Web: http://www.yerdead.com
Web: http://www.myspace.com/jasoneisener

Iron Man

Iron Man is an unusual Hollywood film in that it matches it's special effects and action foundation with a fascinating plot and extremely witty and cynical sense of humour from its lead. The movie opened to praise from the critics and raked in some $100 million in its opening weekend in the US.

At first look it is surprising, it is a movie about a man in a metal suit who becomes a reluctant superhero, but underneath, of course, it is to much more.

It is sometimes hard to transition from a comic book to the film, even more so when translating over time. Iron Man transplants Stan Lee's 1963 Cold War-theme to the present day war in Afghanistan and does so exceptionally well.

Robert Downey Jnr plays Stark, a rich and terribly obnoxious playboy industrialist who specializes in military hardware. He inherited the business from his father and using his own technical ability has made the company what it is today. However, he makes his money hard and fast by trading in all manner of weapon with little to no ethical consideration. He has just developed a new weapon called The Jericho, it takes its name from the mythical Biblical town of Jericho where trumpets supposedly brought down the walls and it does just that – it causes massive damage, quickly, easily and with one hit.

Stark's Convoy is attacked and he is taken captive by terrorists. During captivity he suffers severe heart damage and a local doctor Yinsen (Shaun Toub) improvises a solution using a battery powered magnet to stop the shrapnel from destroying his heart.

The terrorists demand Stark create a "Jericho" weapon for them and under after torture and placed under constant duress he begins work. The terrorists also show Stark the stockpile of "Stark Industry " weapons that he can use to make the weapon and which they use to battle the West, it seems someone is supplying both sides of the war.

This early section of the film is powerful and at times brutal. Its portrayal of the violence of the region and the nature of the conflict gives the film a much sharper bite than most comic book based superhero films. The military and political background of the film matched with Robert Downey Jnr's vicious and cutting wit make Iron Man a very intelligent and adult sort of superhero film. This is certainly not a tale for the kiddies.

Stark and Yinsen are supposedly working on the weapon but actually create a new device to control Starks heart and develop a special suit with which he can escape. Stark believes he can take Yinsen with him but Yinsen always knew this was a one way trip and gives

his life to save Stark reminding him to make the most of the opportunity. Stark does not intend to forget what Yinsen has given him.

The suit allows Stark to escape in truly momentous style and make very short work of the enemy but the suit only carries him so far, it crashes in the desert and Stark is found wandering dehydrated but alive and returns to the US a different man. He gives a press conference in which he advises that Stark Industries will no longer produce weapons, a statement not well received by the shareholders, the military nor his business partner.

What Stark does not realize is that his long time mentor and business partner Obadiah Stane (Jeff Bridges) actually paid to have him killed and is the person supplying weapons to all comers. Stane takes out a court order claiming Stark has “traumatic stress” and takes control of Stark Industries.

Stark realizes what he had to do, he refines the model he has for the suit he created to escape the terrorists, builds a new “heart module” and uses it to destroy the weapons Stane is supplying the terrorists. It is quite an impressive sequence as he flies to Afghanistan, crushes the enemy singlehandedly and has to escape US planes who see him as an incursion into their war zone. He even saves a US pilot falling from his plane along the way !

The subtext about the heart module is also fun, since we learn it was only originally created by the company as a promotional device to keep the greenies and peaceniks off their backs and now it has real use ! But of course Stark wants to use it for peaceful purposes but Stane has the creation of the ultimate killing machine in mind.

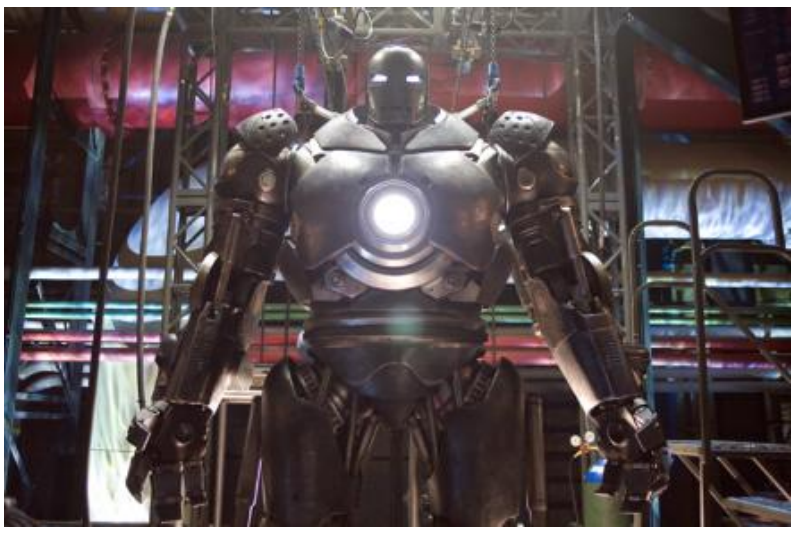
The scenes of Stark developing and testing the suite and all the related technology are a geeks dream ! Time and time again light and comedic relief, which could even be seen as robotic slapstick, is used to great success to break up the story and create a nice arc through personal narrative, drama, humour and robotic battles.

As the story unfolds Stane realizes that Stark will be a problem and so having retrieved the suit Stark abandoned in the desert worked on creating a even bigger “Iron Man” and now the fight is really on.

Iron Man is an unusual superhero film; it spends a lot of time showing the “world at war” and seems to have a dim view of the current state of life. Downey Jnr is superbly cynical and sarcastic and moves the dialogue of the film to a whole new level. He truly inhabits the character and being someone who has had his share of problems in his personal life brings an air of authenticity to derisive Stark.

For many he would not be an immediate choice as a superhero, he has spent a lot of his career playing “anti hero” type roles and certainly has a certain all too human quality.

Yet it is his humanity which makes the film, we are not constantly waiting for superhero biffo, but are watching the unfolding of an unusual and fascinating tale of a man confronted with the “sins” of his past and the damage caused in



his name by the company of which he is part of.

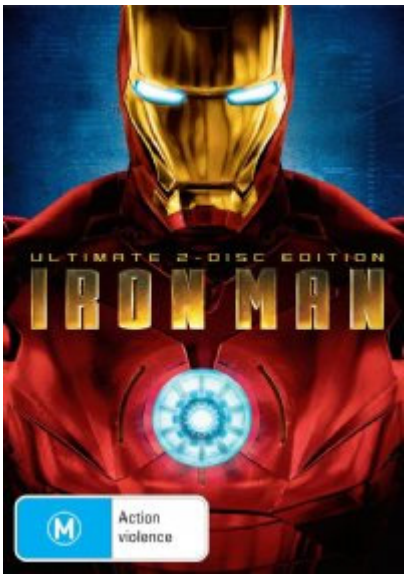
Gwyneth Paltrow as Stark's long-time assistant Pepper Potts is inspired and Jeff Bridges is a great adversary, with his bald head and beard he is hard to identify at first glance. What I liked about Iron Man is that while it used all manner of special effects, technology and action sequences, the film was not just about blowing things up. There was a solid plot throughout, excellent dialogue, good character development and quite a bit of humour.

The comic book nature of Iron Man was not overplayed and while there is a superb good Iron Man Vs bad Iron Man scene at the end, the focus on the film is really on the evolution of Stark from indulgent playboy to a thinking person critical of what is going on around him using the suit to achieve his deeper goals.

Yes, it does have the oh so current model of United States Vs the terrorists but at the same time there is a strong criticism of the use of weapons for their own sake and while it doesn't have a political "message" avoids moving into flag waving territory. Iron Man is certainly an action film and it doesn't try to be anything else but it does have a surprising depth which makes it's even more memorable.

I liked Iron Man for so many reasons it seems to balance the superhero genre with a background of military and political conflict which gives it substance. It also has a strong plot and excellent dialogue which makes it stand out.

I am not sure it would have been so successful without Robert Downey Jnr and I am pleased to hear he will appear in the follow up film as well. The story is listed as in production with the original actors on board and with a projected release date of 2010.



There are various editions of the film including the two DVD special edition on release in Australia which includes some marvellous special features including deleted and extended scenes, the I Am Iron Man - 7-part "Making Of" Documentary, The Invincible Iron Man - 6-part "History of the Hero", Wired: The Visual Effects of Iron Man, Robert Downey Jr. Screen Test, The Actor's Process, Still Galleries and More!

The elaborate 7-part making-of documentary entitled "I Am Iron Man" is quite noteworthy. This documentary chronicles every part of the process of bringing "Iron Man" to the big screen; it is one of the better making of series on any 2008 DVD release.

"The Invincible Iron Man" is another multi-chaptered documentary; this explores the development of the Iron Man character from comic book to cinema. "

Wired: The Visual Effects of Iron Man", gives us an inside look into how the filmmakers created the incredible special effects of the movie. The deleted and extended scenes come to 25 minutes, quite a nice offering.

The second disc in this set is really quite packed with very solid documentaries and content which are worthwhile exploring.

Other editions include the Mask edition which is the two DVD in a collectable Mask and the Ezydvd.com.au tin edition of the two DVD set.

H.H. Holmes
America's First Serial Killer

H.H. Holmes is an outstanding documentary by John Borowski exploring the life and crimes of America's first serial killer. He brings together stock footage, rare and unusual ephemera, old photographs and some chilling re-enactments to help us understand the crimes of Holmes, which if written as fiction, would seem hard to believe. Borowski uses some superb digital manipulation of images and photographs to bring them alive and combined with the re-enactments offers us far more than a traditional "talking heads" documentary.

The black and white filming, which has a deliberately grainy and aged look, adds to the ambiance and when coupled with the soundtrack by Douglas Romayne Stevens creates a strong sense of the period.

H.H Holmes has strong narration by Tony Jay and also includes authoritative interviews with Harold Schecter who wrote the key biography of Holmes and forensic scientist Marian Caporusso. Borowksi works to balance the context of Holmes life and crimes with trying to understand his actions via excerpts from his autobiography written when he was in prison.

Holmes was born in New Hampshire as Herman Webster Mudgett and grew up in a suffocating religious environment; his father was strict and domineering and he was bullied at school. He was very clever but isolated and he went through college and University to eventually become a doctor, it was here during his medical studies that he started to explore his violent and destructive fantasies, these lead to his re-creation of himself as H.H. Holmes and the development of the Castle of Horrors in Suburban Chicago.

Holmes turned 63rd Wallace Street into a literal killing home complete with greased chutes for dumping bodies, torture rooms, a crematorium, acid baths and lime pits and even rooms designed as death chambers.

No one is really sure how many he killed since the Chicago world fair brought so many people into the area and these sorry souls checked in but never checked out, some researchers suggest there was as many as 230. Holmes seemed like a nice man offering cheap accommodation to those in need and so many were more than pleased to take up his offer.

He not only tortured and killed them but spent hours cutting up their bodies, disposing of the organs in acid and lime and preparing the skeletons so they could be sold to medical colleges. He also regularly performed abortions (making extra money from these illegal surgeries) and then using the bodies of those who died.

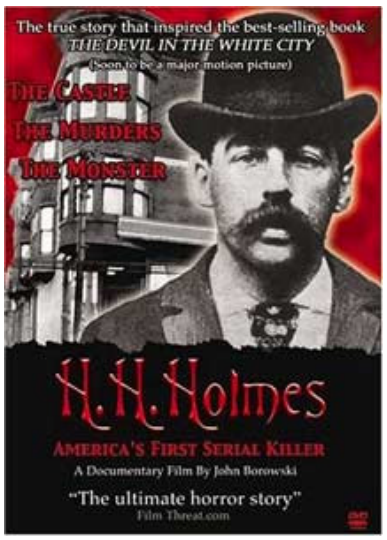
His motives are unclear and seem to include both a fascination with pain, suffering and death and an obsession with money and making money. There are also strange obsessions with medical experimentation. He even had stretching machines in his castle which he alleged were for creating giants ! Yet at the same time he was married three times and never harmed any of his wives ! He was and is an enigma to many criminologists and forensic psychologists.

He certainly seemed to gain gratification from the slow torture of his captives, many were locked in soundproof bedrooms fitted with gas lines that permitted him to asphyxiate them, while others locked in a huge bank vault near his office; he sat and listened with excitement as they screamed, begged and eventually suffocated. He did not need to kill his victims himself, as long as he could watch them die he received satisfaction.

The story of his capture is also quite fascinating; it seems that Marion Hedgepeth, a one-time cellmate of a man who was using the name H.M. Howard, informed police about a recent insurance scam. It involved insuring Benjamin Pitezel for $10,000 and then faking his death in a laboratory explosion by substituting a cadaver. They would split the insurance payment, but Howard had reneged and run off with the money.

After some investigation the company, which had already suspicions about the death scene, discovered that H.M. Howard as actually H.H. Holmes and that Pitezel was his assistant.

Amazingly, if he hadn't been so consumed with greed he may not have been caught for a long time after. However, this miscalculation led to his downfall.



Indeed, he was first convicted of insurance fraud and as they investigated the death of Benjamin Pitezel and his children, this led to the discovery of his castle of death and the trial of the century and media frenzy over his case.

Holmes, it seems, was a con man, manipulator, torturer and murderer. In the end he confessed to 27 murders and six attempted murders and was hung. He sold his story to the newspapers before he died for a handsome figure !

In many ways the story of Holmes is also that of the detectives investigating his case and the slow unravelling of his life of deceit and manipulation.

These were the days before inter departmental police communication and it took a lot of footwork to connect cases from different localities, especially with the level of complexity involved in the Holmes case.

I especially like the way in which this documentary also offers a context to the subject and explores the Chicago World Fair and other factors such as the development of Industry in the US post civil war.

Considering the ferocity of the crimes and the number of victims it is surprising there has been no documentary on Holmes before and Borowski has done a great job offering an insightful if not chilling journey into Holmes crimes.

Extras include a making of documentary, outtakes and trailer, the Story Continues and a fascinating director's commentary.

Each DVD also comes with a floor plan showing the design of the second and third floors of the Castle on 11" x 17" paper.

POULTRYGEIST
NIGHT OF THE CHICKEN DEAD

Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead
Troma Films
R0 NTSC
3 DVD Special Edition

Poultrygeist is the latest in a long line of outrageous horror comedies from Lloyd Kaufman and Troma. Troma began with in the mid 1970s when Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz began producing and distributing sex comedies such as The First-Turn On and Squeeze Play. However, it was in 1985 that Troma experienced true box office success with the horror comedy superhero film The Toxic Avenger, this was followed by many sequels and even an animated series. Troma has also produced a large number of other cult films as well as becoming a major distributor in the field.

Over the years Troma has developed its unique brand of irreverent humour, which while politically incorrect and potentially offensive, actually has an undercurrent of social criticism. For example, even in Toxic Avenger, it is the nerd who becomes the superhero, while the sports jocks are portrayed as the villains. The superhero doesn't kill indiscriminately, but only attacks criminals.

Lloyd Kaufman

I have always found Troma titles hilarious, shocking and horrifying at the same time, the mixture of gore and humour is a truly winning package.

Poultrygeist is really the ultimate Troma film, it seems to be the climax of over 30 years of perverse humour, biting satire, sex and bodily fluid jokes and gore. It is quite extreme so be warned, it has many scenes which are uniquely shocking.

While there are certainly lots of politically-incorrect jokes about ethnicity, sex, gender and religion, the movie offers some surprisingly intelligent dialogue about consumerism, sexism, racism and even animal rights, admittedly in a truly bizarre package.

Arbie (Jason Yachanin) , a recent high school grad can't afford to go to college, in his own words his mother is blind and his father is a retard.

He is having a good time in the local cemetery with his girl Micki (Allyson Sereboff). They are interrupted by a masturbating axe wielding local and then attacked by a strange creature. Luckily they escape – but not because Arbie has got hold of the creature's finger, which happens to be lodged firmly in his arse and kept it as a memento. (This is a warning that this movie has a lot of backside and defecation humour!).

Micki is off to college and promises not to change, or worse lose her love for him, but they inevitably drift apart.

Some years later he goes to the opening of the local American Chicken Bunker store. American Chicken Bunker is a powerful fast food conglomerate which has destroyed a local Native American burial ground to build its new premises in Tromaville. General Lee Roy (Robin Watkins) is the CEO of American Chicken Bunker and is a cross burnin' member of the KKK just like his daddy.

Arbie is shocked to find his girlfriend is now an avowed lipstick lesbian and is protesting against American Chicken Bunker. In fury, he launches into one of the many musical numbers in the movie and then starts to work as American Chicken Bunker as a "counter girl" for three bucks a hour.

Other staff include a gay Mexican named Paco Bell (Khalid Rivera), an redneck animal lover (a true "animal lover" who has a thing for partially defrosted chickens) named Carl Jnr. (Caleb Emerson), and a Muslim woman named Humas (Rose Ghavami), whose name is constantly mispronounced as Hamas. The manager, Denny (Joshua Olatunde), is an African American.

Of course, these characters allow for every possible joke and comedy situation you can imagine, most made in terribly bad taste. However, for all their potential shock value and potential offense, they are actually used to ridicule prejudice rather than reinforce it. It is one of things that endears me to Troma, it may seem to offend on the surface, but when you look closely Troma actually has a very open-minded attitude and uses humour to subvert narrow values.

At the same time, these characters are lots of fun and offer some highly outrageous humorous set pieces ranging from the "chicken lovin'" scene with Carl Jnr and the suicide song with Humas (seen in the extras). There is also lots of lesbian humour and, of course, the required tit shots and sexual slapstick.

As the curse of the Native American Indian Burial Ground takes effect the horror begins and does the horror pack a punch ! It begins with the death of various staff including Carl Jnr as he "plucks a chicken" (literally) and Paco as he tries to add "his own special sauce" to the chicken mix !

However, death is not the end, they are transformed into demon possessed chicken zombies !

These transformations take many forms from laying a huge egg to developing a chicken nose and feathers or even becoming a full-size zombie chicken and these full size zombie chickens are very cool ! I suppose it depends on how much contaminated chicken you eat. Some of the transformations are shown quite close up and are very impressive special effects events. When the chicken pieces come alive and fight back it is truly outrageous with biting chicken drumsticks, fighting chicken breasts and attacking nuggets ! The whole of ACB is taken over by zombie chickens and an orgy of sex and chicken gore.

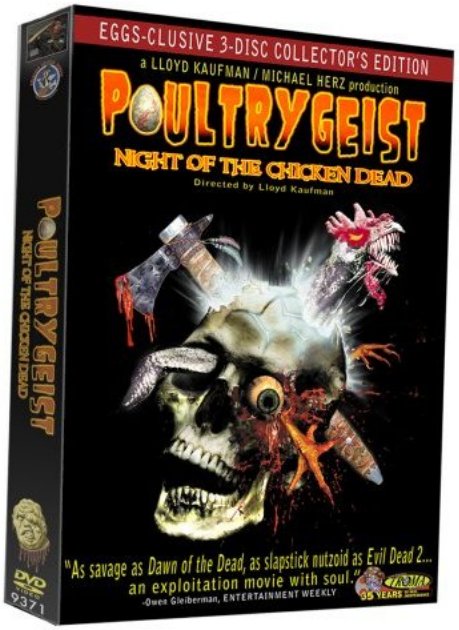
This is truly outstanding entertainment, with lots of humour, satire, musical numbers, bizarre set pieces, gore, sex, more gore and more sex ! It is really the pinnacle of years of development within the Troma studios and is the ultimate Troma extravaganza !

The three DVD special edition package certainly gives the film the attention it deserves.

Disc 1 includes the features and a range of extras accessed via a very fun chicken storefront menu with lots of clucking. There is a excellent audio track from Kaufman and the team, a strange trailer called Lovely Scenes From Bergman's 'Virgin Spring' and a couple of music videos - Calamari Safari Music Video and Count Smokula Music Video. There are also six Troma previews and some hidden Easter eggs. (These are not too difficult to find)

Disc 2 Poultry In Motion: Truth Is Stranger Than Chicken is a feature length behind the scenes documentary that is brutally honest about the work that goes into creating an indie low budget film.

Tromahawk Nuggets includes such gems as a clip from the New York City Premiere, Blow Me... Away - Shooting The American Chicken Bunler Explosion Sequence, Recording the



Songs on how the music was made and Designing the Monsters on how the special effects were done on a budget. There are also a few other sections on the special effects andbackground information on how the film was developed.

There are four deleted scenes including the original ending planned for the film and the controversial but fun Humas Suicide Song which was cut from the film.

Disc 3 is the Kara-Yolk-E disc. Here you can play some of the songs with lyrics and sing along (I kid you not) The songs included here are Poultrygeist Theme Song, Revenge Is A Dish Best Served Fried, Fast Food Love, Generous General, Longing To Live - Waiting To Die, and Suicide. There are also some further trailers.

This is really quite an astounding collector's edition and only a limited number of these sets will be released (15,000). Considering the popularity of Troma films you better get in quick.

Poultrygeist is a real return to form for Kaufman, in my mind it could even be more successful than Toxic Avenger. It has been very well received by the press and already welcome by fans during its theatrical release. Now it is on DVD in such a superb edition it will reach an even larger audience.

This is true indie, low budget genre shock cinema for a new generation !

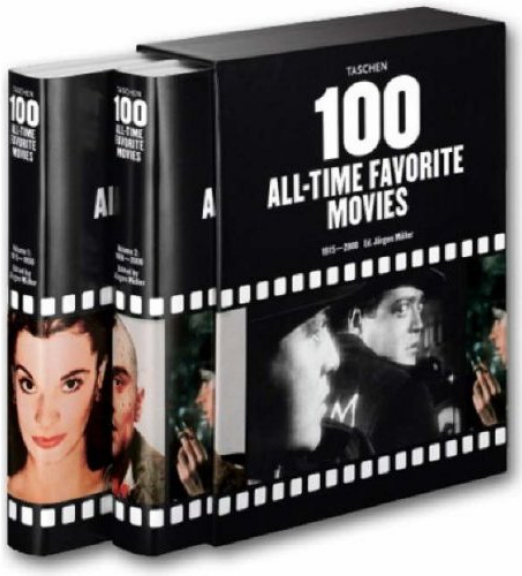
BOOKS IN REVIEW

100 All-Time Favorite Movies
25th Anniversary
Special Edition
Prof. Dr. Jürgen Müller, Editor
Taschen
Tower Books Australia 2008

This is an astounding guide to some of the most significant films of the century. Sure, we may all make different choices, but Taschen have some well qualified reviewers on hand and the choices they have made seem to be pretty close to what many would believe to definitive. Prof. Dr. Jürgen Müller, for example, edits the Taschen Movie decade series and certainly seems to have his finger on the pulse of art and film.

The films presented in this beautifully presented two volume set cover the gambit from horror to comedy, fantasy to tragedy, epic to musical, all genres are represented in this compendium.

Each film is offered extensive coverage and presented in an easy to use chronological format. Entries include a synopsis, cast and crew listings, technical information, actor and director biographies, trivia and awards.



Of course, the visual side is not ignored; the book is illustrated throughout with stills, production photos and ephemera.

This set offers quite a broad coverage of 20th century film. From Metropolis to Citizen Kane, The Seven Samurai to La Dolce Vita, Psycho and Clockwork Orange, The Godfather, Blue Velvet and Pulp Fiction... and so many more cinematic masterpieces including many lesser-known gems.

If you are looking for a way to build a film collection which will educate, entertain and astound, then you couldn't do better than to read this book and start collecting! There is enough here to make you a very informed film lover !

At the same time, If someone you know is too enamored with those clichéd bland releases which are so common today, then this would be a great Xmas gift to get them to expand their cinematic horizons - from classics to world cinema, light comedy to thought provoking, they are all here !

100 All-Time Favorite Movies has been released in a 25th anniversary edition, it is hardcover, 2 volumes in a slipcase and is 800 pages and is, of course, profusely illustrated.

The Alfred Hitchcock Story
Ken Moog
Titan Books 2008
Bookwise Australia

"Lavishly illustrated throughout with rare stills and behind the scenes photos... it is both a treat to look at and a pleasure to read".
Book of the Month Film Review

The Alfred Hitchcock Story is one of the best volumes of the life and work of Alfred Hitchcock on the market today. Originally published in 1999, it has been revised in 2008 and can be considered the definitive book on the Master of Suspense.

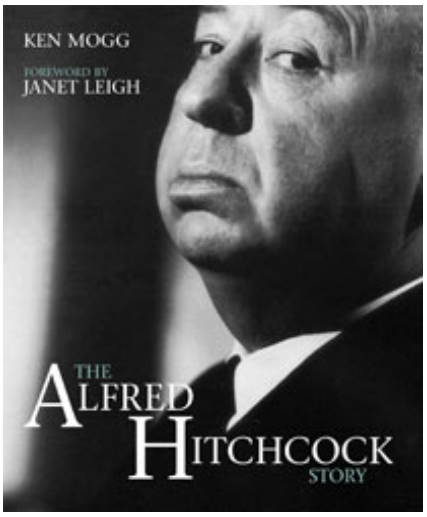
The book is divided into segments: The Early Years (1899-1933), Classic British Movies (1934-1939), Hollywood (1940-1950), The Golden Years (1951-1964), and Languishing (1965-1980). There is comprehensive coverage of all of Hitchcock's films offering plot summations, running times, the production company, and the date of the first screening. It works right through from his early silent films such as The Lodge, through his classic British period of The 39 Steps, to the Hollywood success of Rear Window, Vertigo, North by Northwest, Psycho and beyond.

Accompanying these are production shots, and poster art including many rare posters, lobby cards and ephemera. Indeed, in many ways the Alfred Hitchcock story documents the marketing of the Hitchcock films as much as the man and his work.

On one level the Hitchcock story is primarily a filmography and focuses on the films and the unique direction and production Hitchcock brought to each film rather than too much on the man himself and that keeps it a reasonable size.

At the same time Mogg has undertaken an incredible amount of research and distilled the flood of information down into a concise and entertaining form so it is quite astounding just how much information is included in this volume with a reasonable coverage of all aspects of Hitchcock's life and career while keeping the work focused.

There is also a lot of rare and unusual research into the experiences of those working on the Hitchcock films, for example, we find out the story behind the song the children are singing in "The Birds" as the birds are massing outside in the playground.

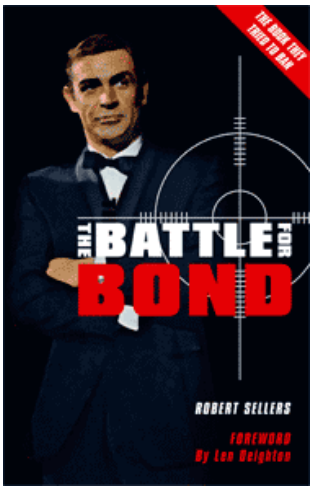


Mogg also makes good use of scholars and film critics to assist us come to understand Hitchcock's unique approach to filmmaking and his vision of "pure cinema". There is also some interesting insight into Hitchcock's philosophical worldview and the works that influenced the way in which he created his films.

The volume opens with an excellent article by Janet Leigh and is followed with an essay by Dan Auiler on Hitchcock's background.

This is a superb book, beautiful to look at, filled with posters, productions stills and ephemera and offers a superb film by film guide to the canon of one of the world's greatest filmmakers.

The Battle for Bond
By Robert Sellers
Foreword by
Len Deighton
Tomahawk Press



The Battle for Bond is an explosive read, well researched yet controversial, filled to the brim with intrigue, betrayal and legal battles – much like James Bond on screen.

The first edition was banned by the Ian Fleming Will Trust in a David and Goliath dispute where a small press was suppressed in what appeared to most members of the press as undue censorship. Now, as last, a second edition of the book has been released and is a riveting read.

The shocking truth revealed in these pages is

that the screen version of James Bond so heralded as the creation of Ian Fleming, was actually the creation of Jack Whittingham, who was employed by producer Kevin McClory to adapt the character to the big screen. Indeed, the unique vision of Whittingham was what gave James Bond his unique screen persona. It could be construed that so many of his cinematic characteristics that made Bond successful would not have occurred without Whittingham's work.

The Battle for Bond is quite a sad and bitter tale. It is the story of Kevin McClory's 40 year legal battle over the rights to the screen version of James Bond, which he and Whittingham had created. It involved all manner of recriminations, multi-million lawsuits and personal betrayals. It finally led to a 1963 court battle where Ian Fleming was accused of plagiarism; however he died during the trial. The upshot was that Kevin McClory won the film rights and chose a deal with Harry Saltzman and Albert R. Broccoli which resulted in Thunderball (1965). While the rights gave him certain rights and entitled him to remake Thunderball (1965) as Never Say Never Again (1983), again with Sean Connery as James Bond, he hadn't banked on the opposition by MGM and Albert R. Broccoli and when his aim to create his own James Bond series was thwarted a further legal battle ensued.

While every aspect of the Bond story has been well documented, this had been a subject which has been "off the menu" for quite a while and hence only mentioned in an aside or even ignored in other volumes.

This is an exhaustively researched volume yet at the same time entertaining, well paced and enjoyable. Sellers knows how to make a complex book informative as well as readable. The Battle for Bond is a fascinating book and comes well illustrated with many rarely seen photographs.

Web: http://www.tomahawkpress.com

The Big Book of Top Gear
BBC Magazines
BBC Books 2008

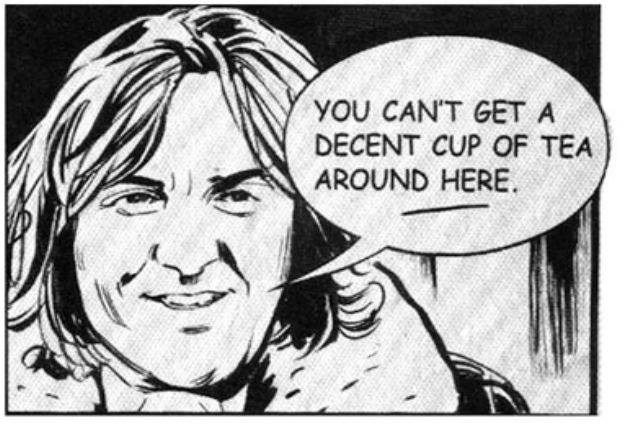
Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

Yes, it's a book about the top-rating motoring show. Coincidentally, this is the thirtieth year of Top Gear's production (under a variety of names and with a range of presenters).

It has gone from being a serious motoring show in 1978 featuring Angela Rippon's legs to a less-than-serious show featuring Jeremy Clarkson's ego (oh, and a couple of other presenters as well). Since most of us own cars that are, face it, fairly boring, the show now concentrates on the few non-boring ones and some of the interesting things one can do with the rest.

All the best parts of the TV show are included. The presenters come in for a hammering from each other (even Richard Hammond's suspiciously-white teeth get a passing swipe), and the jokes about the Stig and Americans and Fiats all get an airing again. The best of the Challenges are there, too, in photographic essays.

We have Driving across America's deep south (So Real It's Like Actually Being Killed By Hicks), driving across Africa, driving to the North Pole, and my personal favourite, the disastrous Reliant Robin Space Shuttle.



The chapters on these are necessarily brief, but the photography is comprehensive.

The book is filled with lots of photos that bring back memories of the best moments of the shows, and the text commentary accurately reflects its style and presentation.

That is really the book's strong point. It brings back memories of the shows and the personalities of the presenters much quicker than firing up the DVD player.

It may inspire you to put on the DVD of your favourite shows later on, but meanwhile the book brings back all the memories of those great moments.

It's also a lot easier to pass around your friends. It's a good thing it's in hard cover, so it can take the wear and tear.

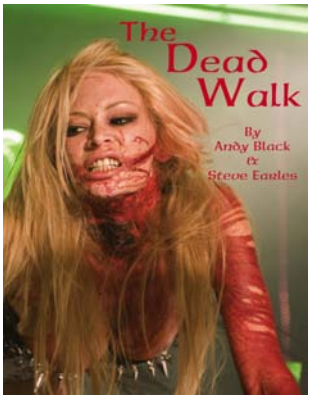
The book is also full of useful information for fans of the show. There is a ready-made complaints sheet to send off to the BBC, a history of Top Gear, a Get The Look! Section that shows how you, too, can look like your favourite presenter for less than twenty pounds, and a question and answer section (Why is there a bloody great Boeing 747 on the test track?). Pages of Poweeerrr! features the favourite cars of guess-which presenter.

As befits a TV show, the book is highly visually-oriented. The photos are high quality, the book's presentation is lavish, the text is hilarious.

I started reading it and enjoyed it so much I couldn't put it down until I finished it a couple of hours later.

It's a brilliant recreation of the show in book form.

The Dead Walk
Andy Black
& Steve Earles
Noir Publishing
2008



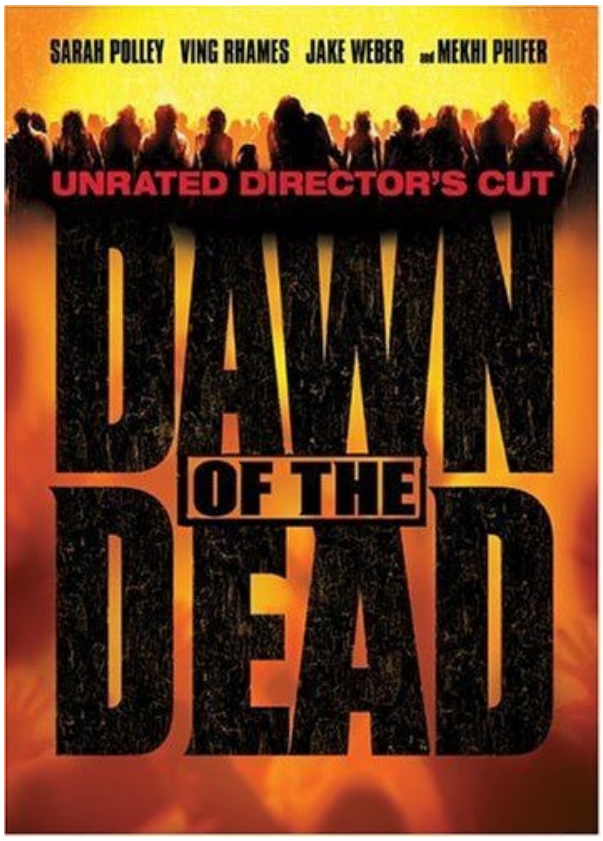
The Dead Walk is the ultimate guide to Zombie films. It is not only comprehensive but covers zombies in the widest possible interpretation hence also includes everything from the early traditions of Voodoo to the skeletons of Jason and the Argonauts. The shock horrors of the splatter films of the Eighties to zombies in science fiction. This is really quite an exhaustive coverage of the subject including every possible aspect of the zombie film phenomenon around the world with a fascinating discussion of "Zombie World Cinema".

The book opens with a solid introduction to the historical roots of Voodoo and offers a credible background to the nature of voodoo, theories on how zombies are created and background on the various psychoactive substances which are used in Haiti for the purpose. This chapter includes some good scientific background including discussion of such films as The Serpent and the Rainbow which was based on Wade Davis' research into the zombies of Haiti.

This is followed by an examination of the early black and white classic zombie films and their significance within the development of early cinema. Of course, no horror book would be complete with a section on Hammer and next we get a solid chapter on Hammer horror zombies primarily focuses on the classic Plague of the Zombies. General overviews are also complimented with specific chapters of significant filmmakers such as the next chapters on George Romero and Lucio Fulci. Covering each of their zombies films in quite some detail including lesser known titles as a Romero's The Crazies.

We then look at specifically American Zombie films and next have a superb overview of Zombies in film from around the globe. From New Zealand to China, Spain to France – Jeff Franco and Rollins, they are all there !

Of course, there are Zombies which cross over from horror to science fiction and this is



covered next. One of the more interesting zombie film derivations developed from the West's obsession with Egypt, so next we have a special look at Mummies (with special reference to the new universal Mummy series) and finally a look at the latest trends in zombie films. This is also a superb filmography.

It is amazing how many films are given critical attention with intelligent and insightful reviews. From all the films of George A Romero (as well as all the remakes and derivatives), to the Evil Dead Series, Hellraiser Series, Planet Terror, Shaun of the Dead and Doomsday. From the most obscure to the best known, they are all covered, it would be hard to list all the films which are given loving attention. The Dead Walk is also filled to the brim with lots of photos and images. This is a superb looking book with over 300 illustrations including lots of very rare stills.

There are also special "focus" sections such as special look at Day of the Dead and the original script, the Knight Templar and Spanish Zombie films of Amando de Ossorio and the connection between Romero's Zombie films and the I am Legend Science fiction story by Richard Matheson

This really is the ultimate guide for Zombie film lovers and is most highly recommended.

Web: http://www.noirpublishing.co.uk

Hazel Court - Horror Queen: An Autobiography
Hazel Court
Tomahawk Press 2008

Hazel Court, the celebrated English actress passed away suddenly on 14 April 2008, only a few days before her long-awaited memoir was published. The book has now become a memorial to her - one that will be cherished by her fans forever.

Hazel Court has been described as the "Ultimate Scream Queen", due to her work with both Hammer Films and Roger Corman. She is the only actress to have worked with all of horror-films' leading men Boris Karloff, Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and Christopher Lee. But Hazel Court was so much more than a Scream Queen! She was one of England's top film actresses in the 40's and 50's as well as one of the world's top pin-ups.

Hazel went on to have a high-profile career in US television in the 60's (Alfred Hitchcock Presents, Bonanza, Dr. Kildare, Rawhide, Mission Impossible, The Twilight Zone, Burke's Law, The Wild Wild West, and many more). Her autobiography traces her path from her childhood in the West Midlands of England to Lake Tahoe; from famous actress to internationally acclaimed sculptor and artist.

Hazel provides a unique and emotionally moving view of an English woman's life in Hollywood. Lavishly illustrated with rare photos – including some that you never thought you'd see!

I am Innocent
A Comprehensive Encyclopaedic History of the World's Wrongly Convicted Persons
Jay Robert Nash
Da Capo Press 2008

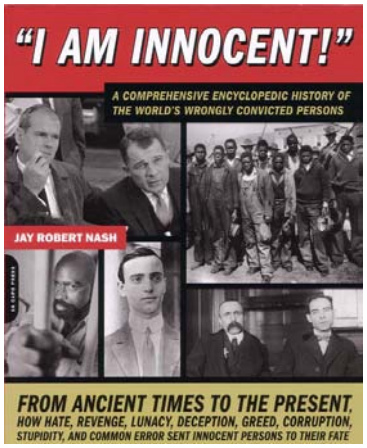
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Never trust anybody with your freedom. That's about the only conclusion I can draw from this book. It is a litany of all the worst of human nature, in so far as the imprisonment or execution of the victims is concerned.
It covers lazy lawyers, incompetent judges, uncaring governments, publicity seekers, and particularly people in high office who are prepared to see the laws trampled on to preserve their power.

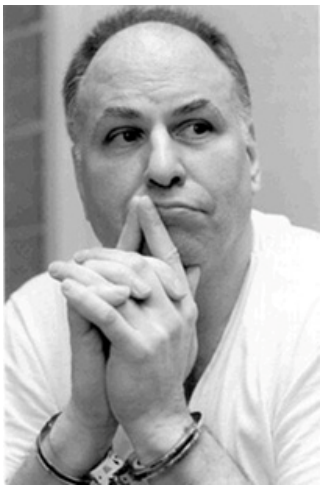
A particularly good example is the crucifixion of Jesus, which is explained by the author in terms of the politics of Roman-occupied Judaea at the time, and the desire of the priest class to keep their privileged position. Balanced against this is the ruling class, who don't want to see any sort of gathering point for rebellion in their area.

Similarly, Joan of Arc was forced into execution by an established religion that didn't want the common people having direct conversations with God, and a ruling class who didn't want Joan as a rallying point for revolution. "Witch Trials" were another convenient way to maintain religious control over the population.

In more modern times as the common people gained power, they also abused it to vent their prejudices against race, religion, money (or lack of it), and as a quick and lazy way to gain prestige within their community. The United States does not come off well in this book, and the state of Florida particularly comes in with a large share of race-inspired bigotry leading to incorrect imprisonment and executions. Its judges, prosecutors and even the juries in some cases have been guilty of some of the grossest miscarriages of justice catalogued in the book.



Not all confessions are genuine. Nash has a fascinating segment on false confessions. The reasons people confess to crimes is fascinating, but not as fascinating as the motives of the law enforcement officers who accept these confessions even though they are obviously false. In far too many cases the confession was accepted and the conflicting evidence quietly hidden.


Steven Manning

There are examples where a convicted person has requested DNA testing to prove their innocence, but the local authorities have denied this simple test lest it bring the evidence given in the trial into question.

The legal system is not above criticism. In the Pellegrino murder case in Chicago, an ex-policeman, Steven Manning, was arrested for the murder. Manning had been working for the FBI as an undercover informant, but had told them he wanted nothing more to do with them. They insisted and he took civil action against the FBI for harassment. He was put in a cell with a notorious informer and known liar, who was promised a reduction in his sentence if he could tape an incriminating admission by Manning. The tapes revealed nothing, but the informer said Manning had admitted it during a blank 2-second section of the tape. Judge Edward Fiala admitted the tapes into evidence, even though there was no mention of Pellegrino on them.

The jury was not told that the tapes had no evidence on them. Pellegrino's wife said in evidence that her husband had warned her Manning was out to get him. On this irrelevant evidence Manning was sentenced to death. Seven years later, following appeals and a newspaper campaign, Manning was finally freed after the Appeals Court ruled Judge Fiala should not have admitted the tapes, and Pellegrino's wife's evidence was only hearsay and should not have been admitted either. The informant's sentence was reduced by eight years. Manning was immediately rearrested on a prior kidnapping charge and started a 100-year sentence.

He fought the kidnapping charge through appeals and six years later a jury ruled he was not guilty of either Pellegrino's death or the kidnapping. The jury said he had been framed on both charges by two FBI agents, Robert Buchan and Gary Miller, over his refusal to continue working undercover.

Manning was awarded 6.6 million dollars in compensation for his fourteen years in jail. The FBI said that it did not believe the agents had engaged in any misconduct. At the time of writing both agents were still employed by the FBI. Who are the criminals in this case?

The idea of an incompetent judge going along with framing a suspect is not unique. In the United States, where so many public officials are elected and a high public profile is necessary, there have been many cases of officials railroading suspects into jail.

This is to show they are tough on crime, to go along with local racial prejudices, or because other powerful figures have placed weak officials under pressure to go along with it. Florida features prominently in some of the most blatant miscarriages of justice, particularly in racially-motivated cases. They are not alone, however. Chicago has had its share of ethnic troubles, and a number are detailed in the book.

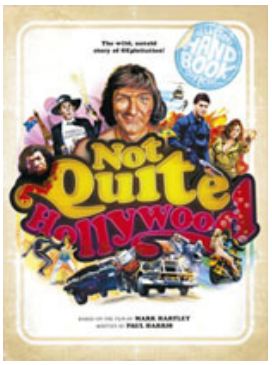
Although the book is strongly U.S – oriented, many other countries come in for there share of comment. It appears that the longer the justice system as we know it has existed in these countries, the more enthusiastically it is abused.

Nash is a good writer, and although his work raises indignation in the reader it is more factual than sensational or emotional. He has researched and catalogued the foibles of world justice systems for many years.

This book is the latest in his series of reference works, which have won "Best Reference" awards from the American Library Association.

This is in spite of his known habit of including some fictitious entries in his books to trap copyright violaters. Subject to this caveat, the book is a worthwhile read on subjects that will make the reader uncomfortable about the safety of their freedom.

Not Quite Hollywood
The Official
Collector's Handbook
Paul Harris
Madman
Entertainment 2008



Not Quite Hollywood has become a cult phenomenon. It started out as a film about Australian Ozploitation films and has single handed triggered a resurgence of interest in Australian cult cinema.

It was a huge box office success and has been released on DVD in a single and double DVD special edition. It has triggered a flood of Ozploitation titles on both the Australian and US market many of which have never been on DVD before.

A unique offering from Madman Entertainment is the Official Collections Handbook, it includes a wealth of background information on the films covered in Not Quite Hollywood and is packed with rare photographs and posters. From free-wheelin' sex romps to blood-soaked terror tales, from road movies to grind house, it is all here in uncensored glory !

Ranging from Alvin Purple to Madmax, the enigmatic Harlequin to the potentially offensive Turkey Shoot, the Not Quite Hollywood book covers them all with introductions to the various sub genres, snapshots reviews and lots of great artwork.

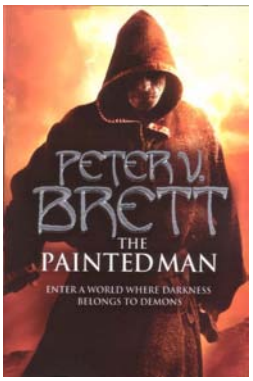
Bursting with outrageous anecdotes, trivia and graphic poster art and including insights from key cast, crew and fans - including Quentin Tarantino - this is the wild, untold story of an era when Aussie cinema got its gear off and showed the world a full-frontal explosion of boobs, pubes, tubes... and even a little kung fu!

Not Quite Hollywood: The Official Collector's Handbook is 84 pages, perfect bound and profusely illustrated.

This is a limited edition item and is worth getting hold of. It will be a unique addition to any Ozploitation cinema lovers library.

Web: http://www.madman.com.au

The Painted Man
Peter Brett
Harper Voyager 2008



This is Peter Brett's first published novel, and I hope it will not be his last. It has already gone into reprint since its September release, and continues to sell well worldwide. The Painted Man is being released as The Warded Man in the U.S. in March 2009

It is pure fantasy, but Brett has broken away a little from the "bunch of characters in a quest for the magical XXX that will save the world" so common in the genre. Instead he describes a world where mindless killer demons rule the world at night, and humans huddle in partial safety behind their magical "wards". The demons are not completely invincible, however, and an underlying thread of the storyline is the development and rediscovery of ways of killing them. Since the olden "Days of Science" many of these techniques have been lost, and the land is now under the control of a religious hierarchy which sees the demons as Man's punishment for adopting science over faith and belief.

The book follows the stories of a number of people in this world, whose paths will eventually cross and whose skills may help Mankind to rise up against the Demons. Brett's love of the fantasy genre shows through, with many of the common themes appearing in the story. This use of familiar themes makes the book easy to adjust to. In spite of this he tells a story that is left open ended, and may or may not leave mankind victorious. Either way there is going to be a long, bloody struggle before the world is rid of the demons.

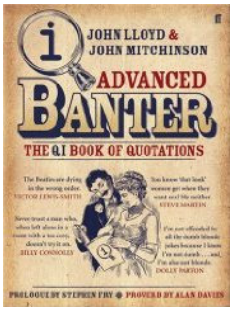
Brett develops his characters lovingly from their childhoods, and uses their development to acquaint us with the characteristics of this world. As the characters grow, so does the plot.

There are few slow moments in the story. It culminates in a battle in a little village whose people are inspired to go out at night and fight the demons rather than hide in their homes. I liked the story, I liked the characters. Peter Brett has crafted a fine novel, satisfyingly different from run-of-the-mill fantasy, and there any many ideas left undeveloped as yet.

The conflict between science and religion can be developed, and the politics of the world's feudal system leaves many opportunities for further novels in a series. I can only hope that he will take up the loose ends he has left and develop further stories from this one. His contract with Del Rey Publishing allows for two more, and I can't wait.

Peter Brett's website:
http://www.petervbrett.com

QI: Advanced Banter
John Lloyd and John Mitchinson
Faber 2008
Allen and Unwin 2008 (Australia)



I think people would be alive today if there were a death penalty.
Nancy Reagan

You know "that look" women get when they want sex? Me neither.
Steve Martin

Have you ever wondered why most books of quotations are stuffed full of rather pedestrian quotes by people you've never heard of? Here's the book you really need. The thoughtful gentlemen of QI have delivered this elusive holy grail: the big, useful, funny and really very good book of quotations.

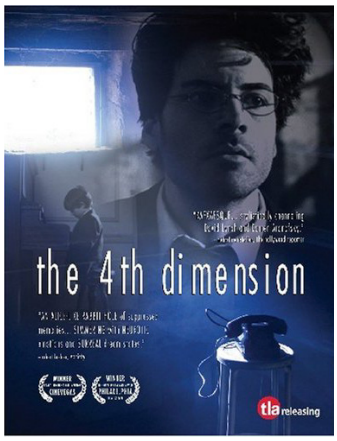
Organized into 400 subjects from ambition to worry (or from artichokes to windows) this book offers you a useful (if not biting and perhaps a little nasty) take on almost every situation life throws at you, from the death of your cat to the end of the world as we know it. It's a sourcebook of one-liners, of knock-out jokes, of droll asides and heartfelt statements of truth and beauty, a practical handbook of wit and intelligence.

As well as the quotes themselves, there is a prologue from the fuehrer of banter himself, Stephen Fry, and lots of quite fascinating background information on the people quoted (and-misquoted).

Six years of learning how to avoid the dull stuff have left the QI team in a uniquely good position to deliver a knock out book.

FILM REVIEWS

The 4th Dimension
TLA Releasing
R1 DVD



The film opens with some beautiful black and white cinematography and a superb steady-cam shot focussing in on Jack Emitni who lies sleeping in a ditch overed in show. His narration tells us that he is obsessed with the nature of time (Emitni = in time) and this opens a strange and enigmatic film which explores the nature of memory, loss, madness and philosophy.

For a film made on a low budget the first thing you notice is the superbly bleak and brooding mood created by the black and white cinematography, it is at times breathtakingly beautiful, at others incredibly lonely and melancholic, there is no doubt that the director of photography Daniel Watchulonis and production designer Nathan Kalushner have done an amazing job. When you couple this with a minimalistic electro soundtrack, you create a haunting film which will make you think about it for some time later.

The plot is intriguing and its twists and turns accomplished. Jack is a very gifted yet troubled child; he seems to have problems relating to people and yet is clearly very intelligent.

He has marked obsessive traits relating to cleanliness and lives in fear of his mother dying. For what is shown, today he would probably be diagnosed as having Aspersers Syndrome.

The film moves between the present where Jack is some sort of clock maker and flashbacks of the events of Jack's childhood. Jack lives alone, isolated in a dream world and seems unable to tell the difference between the world outside and what he perceives in dreams.

One day a mysterious woman brings Jack an old broken clock to repair. However, a short time later she requests he immediately return it. Jack dreams it contains a journal containing Einstein's unfinished Unified Field Theory, so he returns to the house where the clock is kept, breaks in and steals it. He repairs the clock and begins to study the nature of time using Einstein's journal.

The film deliberately plays with the viewer refusing to allow us to get a handle on exactly where it is coming from. Is it a science fiction tale about time? Is Jack a genius or mad? Can be really manipulate time or is it only within his own mind? This lack of certainly is what makes the 4th Dimension a fascinating film.

The sections on Jack's exploration of the nature of time are intriguing, offering quite lucid outlines of both conventional and unconventional theories on time as a potential 4th dimension. Indeed many of the theories on time reminded me of those expounded by P.D. Ouspensky, a radical Russian philosopher who wrote about time as a 4th dimension.

As the film progresses it becomes more and more surreal, we notice Jack's dishevelled home slowly becoming filled with trains and the phone is on a pedestal in a room lit by twilight. More and more his reality seems to be becoming dreamlike. He travels on a train and yet we see scenes of him sitting on a train which has been obviously burn out. We slowly begin to wonder if this film is not about time at all but about Jack's mental disintegration.

The climax of the film is sad and moving, Jack returns to an abandoned hospital where he discovers a document outlining his discharge and the fact that the woman who brought the clock for repair is a mental health caseworker.

He has been a long term mental patient, committed after his mother's death when he was seven. His obsession with time has been his way of trying to escape the pain of his loss of his mother which he still has not been able to do. The final scenes are powerful as we see Jack simultaneously as how he sees himself and how he really is.

The film ends on a sombre note on the real story beyond the 4th Dimension. The Philadelphia State Hospital opened in 1903 as an overflow facility for the mentally ill.

By 1950, it grew into a campus of over 50 buildings. While in operation it developed an infamous reputation for being overpopulated and understaffed, resulting in horrific living conditions, accompanied by patient experimentation, neglect and mistreatment. In 1990 it was officially shut down and vacated, and many of the patients were released. Many homeless people have been found squatting in the buildings, it is believed by many that they were once patients, trying to find their way home. It was finally demolished in 2007.

The 4th Dimension is a highly successful independent film on so many levels. It offers superb cinematography, a bleak soundtrack and a story which keeps you thinking right to the very end. The climax is both moving and poignant and brings together all the different strands of the film in an unexpected yet sombre conclusion.

The 4th Dimension is what quality indie filmmaking is all about.

Web: http://4thmovie.com

A Blade in the Dark
Lamberto Bava
Blue Underground
R0 NTSC

A Blade in the Dark opens with an impressive scene. Three boys are playing dare near a dark staircase, two of them throw a tennis ball down the stairs and challenge the third to go and retrieve it. He does not return - the ball bounces back covered in blood, leaving bloody marks wherever it touches. At first we think this is the film itself and it captures a strong mood of terror, however, we soon realize this is a scene from a horror film which Bruno has been hired to compose a score for.

He is holed up in a very nice isolated villa with only the grounds man Giovanni (Molnar) living in a nearby cottage. Tony, the owner has gone to Kuwait to work on his father's oil rig and hires out the Villa on a short term basis. The Villa used to be occupied by Linda, who left rather quickly and has some of her possessions stored in a room downstairs.

Sandra is the director of the film and has installed Bruno in such a location to help trigger his creative juices in the hope of a good score. However, the line between reality and fiction soon blurs and we are unsure whether Bruno is paranoid or whether something is really going on. This is nicely presented as the score that Bruno is composing becomes the music to the film.

Soon the Villa has some unusual visitors including some attractive ladies who live down the street. They used to swim in the pool when Linda lived there – soon both of these women vanish without a trace. We see their brutal murders, but Bruno has no idea of what is occurring around him.

Bruno begins to get suspicious, his visitors have vanished and he finds all sorts of strange hints that something sinister is occurring ranging from messages on his reel to reel machine to pages torn from a diary and a more obviously threatening knife mark in the bathroom cupboard.

When Sandra hears that the Villa used to be occupied by "Linda", she asks for more details and describes how her film is based on a real childhood trauma tale of someone called Linda. Along the way we get some false leads (such as Bruno's girlfriend who seems to have left her play on opening night for no good reason), but finally we realize Linda and the previous occupant of the Villa are the same person, but not before all manner of very gruesome deaths,

deaths, shown with all sorts of slashing, knifing and blade work.

The final revelation that Linda is actually the man who rented out the Villa and has a gender problem caused by a childhood trauma when he was taunted for not being brave and hence "being a female" is a bit of a stretch. Without questioning the bizarre psychology behind the premise of the film, there are some obvious logical problems. Are we really to believe that the two girls regularly came and met Linda and swam in the pool without noticing that she was a he, certainly the appearance of Linda at the end makes it clear he/she is not a very convincing gender-changer !

The rather tired old evil "transvestite" model which began with Psycho was somewhat outdated even in 1983 when A Blade in the Dark was made and hence is not an especially convincing ending. It doesn't ruin the experience of the film but certainly makes the conclusion somewhat anti-climatic.

Don't get me wrong, this is a solid Giallo with some great killings, suspenseful moments and nicely distorts the line between reality and fiction. The cinematography and the De Angelis score are especially moody and the film certainly keeps up the tension, so is worth seeing. The edition from Blue Underground is a superb restoration and also includes key interviews.

Actiongirls 1-4
Scotty JX Production
Web: http://www.actiongirls.com

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Many years ago there was a particularly silly movie called, I think, "Sexy Girls With Big Guns". Nubile young ladies tottered around the shooting range in bikinis and high heels firing ever larger guns and trying to explain seriously why every girl needed an AK47 for personal defence. Scotty JX, the producer behind Actiongirls, must remember that movie fondly. In Actiongirls, he has apparently tried to remake the earlier movie but this time with a plot. Here it is: "Based in the future, the world as we know it has been destroyed. Menacing gangs ravage and loot the cities and towns searching for new members. Follow the Actiongirls each week in their ongoing story of survival, alone and outnumbered they must do what it takes to survive in this hostile world."

At this point the writer and scriptwriter went down to the pub for a beer, leaving the movie completely without a plot, or any dialog at all. The producer, however, did not let this hold him back.

The story (I use the term loosely) stars three extremely well built young ladies with about six small pieces of clothing between them. When they go looking for the bad guys, who in Episode 1 are holed up in an abandoned factory (why not a comfortable hotel?) it is apparently necessary for them to remove most of their clothing before firing blanks wildly at nothing in particular. The reason for this is not explained in the movie. The bad guys do not, however, find it necessary to remove their clothing, so perhaps it's a recognition thing – if it's nude, don't shoot it. The gunfire would normally alert every bad guy within miles, but the girls have a secret weapon – camouflage-pattern see-though thongs which seems to make them invisible to bad guys. Even these have to go, eventually. None of the girls seems able to pass a mirror or a tap without disrobing completely and striking a pose, getting wet or renewing the coating of baby oil on her butt cheeks, and then shooting off hundreds more rounds which still do not attract the bad guys. This is not explained in the movie. They will stand posing in the open for many minutes at a time while the camera lovingly caresses every …. But you get the picture.

Sooner or later bad guys appear and quickly get shot, thereby providing the only attempt at acting in the entire first film. I counted seven – this is not exactly a "menacing gang", since all except the last one were dispatched with a single shot each.

From time to time each girl gets a different gun, generally a larger calibre than what she had before. She will then once again strip off and fire many blanks from her new gun at nothing in particular. Where these guns magically appear from is not explained, but they include rocket launchers, flamethrowers and heavy machine guns. The girls certainly didn't carry them in the pockets of their camo thongs.

One rather psycho girl takes time off to chop some wood. The reason for this is not explained. With an axe in her hand and no sense of direction, she is in more danger of harming herself than the wood. She appears later, again with the axe, and proceeds to torture a doll (a perfectly logical thing to find in an abandoned factory) and some watermelons. At this point a nearby bad guy who is unable to see her FINALLY hears a shot and jumps on his motorbike to investigate. Unarmed. He does wheelstands and donuts up and down the road (the reason for this is not explained) until he is finally put out of our misery by one of the girls with a sniper rifle. After four shots. And that's about it.

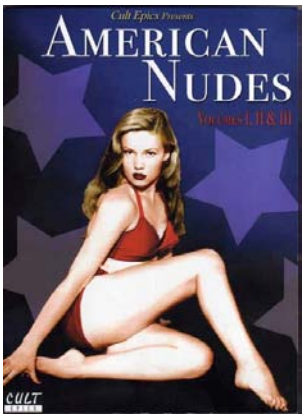
The cover slick explains that the second movie has a bigger budget. It was mostly used to buy baby oil. We have an all-new bunch of babes, with Sylvia Saint again holding down the lead role. This time there is a bit more action with the baddies, who appear to be rogue cops. Sylvia Saint has apparently dossed down in one of the cells, and she and the police haven't noticed each other. Unexplained.

The third movie now introduces Scotty JX's obsession with military vehicles. We have tanks, trucks and various armoured vehicles. We also have a new batch of girls applying baby oil, and the strip scenes are getting quite soft-porn. The cover proudly boasts "No boring dialog included…." Well, I wouldn't have noticed. Sylvia must save the captured girls from a prison camp, where they are being used to dig a ditch – how degrading. The movie doesn't explain how she finds them – she probably followed the trail of baby oil.
Scotty JX seems to have given up on No. 4. It has absolutely no connection with the original plot, thin though it was. This is simply a selection of strip shows in grotty buildings, occasionally with guns. The strip scene on the top floor of a skyscraper features a motorbike as a prop. How did it get there? Why is it there? This is, as usual, quite unexplained. The cover really explains the whole series – "Watch Scotty JX throw piles of money away to keep you entertained". If you follow my advice in the next paragraph, you'll be too drunk to notice anyway.

Now, I would be the last one to suggest that this series is simply a quick skin flick that exploits attractive women and panders to the audience's passion for large ti….sorry, weapons. No, I wouldn't. Let's face it, it's all about tits and guns. It's so dreadful that it goes right past "bad" and comes out "hilarious". It's no cheap production, though - it's beautifully filmed with quite sexy women. It's a slick, professional production that simply lacks the traditional movie values (like a plot, dialog and continuity). I am reminded of a line from Monty Python's "Time Bandits" – "mercifully free of the ravages of intelligence…". Wait until Saturday afternoon, get a few mates around and a lot of beer, sit back and enjoy it.

Previews are available at:
http://www.actiongirls.com/welcome.htm

American Nudes
Cult Epics
3 Disc digipack



This is a difficult set of DVDs to classify. It is a collection of American "erotic" short films from the 1930s to the 1970s. For "erotic" read "pornographic" - although they may not seem so now, in their day they only pretended to be artistic. The set of DVDs doesn't pretend to be educational – there is no commentary or sleeve notes. It is not really pornographic by current standards – as far as the women are concerned , you can see more on an average beach in summer these days. It does, however, reflect the trends in what titillated men over the years.

The first DVD is from the 1940s period. The plots, such as they are, consist of various pretexts for girls to undress. These include an expose of girls who take their clothes off for money ("They Wear No Clothes!" – shock, simulated horror !) and, of course , the compulsory "documentary" on nudist camps. ("They won't even allow dressing on their salads"). The obsession at this time was apparently with breasts. Very little is shown below the waist, and even that must have neatly-trimmed pubic hair. The girls at least were young, looked happy in their work, and the short films were well made and come out well on the DVD.

Volume 2 covers the 1950 – 1960 period. In this post-war time the producers seem to have lost the touch of simple class that they had in the earlier decade. The quality of the production seems lower, the women somewhat older and bulkier, and the action consists of them taking off their clothes and rolling around a bit on the bed.

There is no attempt at a plot, however minimal. Girls "wrestling" each other is about as exciting as it gets. Producer Irving Klaw seems to have been an expert at these quickie soft-cores. He and actress Bette Page turned them out at an alarming rate.

His sister Paula also featured in some of his movies, and he gradually built up a stable of burlesque dancers such as Blaze Starr for his productions. Tame by today's standards, they really pushed the limits in the 1950s.

Unless you are a fan of suspender belts and stockings, though, it is hard to imagine that these were regarded as pornography in their day.

There are brief appearances by Klaytan W Kirby, "Famous Underwater Danseur", in a couple of underwater "mermaid" sequences. The underwater scenes were filmed in the pool at the Town House in Los Angeles – it's prominently marked on the wall of the "ocean" in both clips. Kirby was better known as a producer of soft core porn which never quite made the grade. In the two clips of his work on this DVD, everyone appears to be dressed. Pornographic – well, not quite.

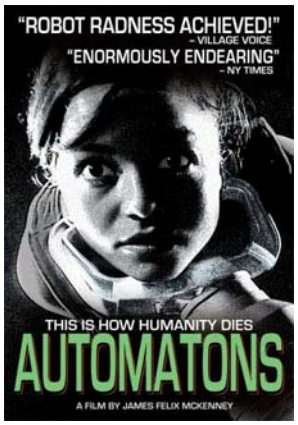
The films from which the DVD was compiled seem to have had a rough life as well, with numerous streaks and marks. This section could have done with a bit of digital retouching. Overall, the films of this period look a bit cheap and tawdry.

Volume 3 covers 1960 to 1970, just before some real money was put into the industry to produce feature-length shows like "Sex World". Color was introduced, but the subtlety is gone, the women are rather hard-looking, and nothing is spared from the probing eye of the camera. The clips show this period as the beginning of mass production hard-core, complete with full visible penetration and "money shots".

I am a little sorry that the set does not include some clips from the pornography renaissance of the late 1970s and 1980s, when good scripts and quality production led to some of porn's greater productions. What is included on Volume 3 is some very early (around the 1930s) clips of surprisingly hard core films. The poor quality of the film hides the detail, but they are quaint and rather whimsical in their silent movie style, and a worthwhile addition to the collection.

Web: http://www.cultepics.com

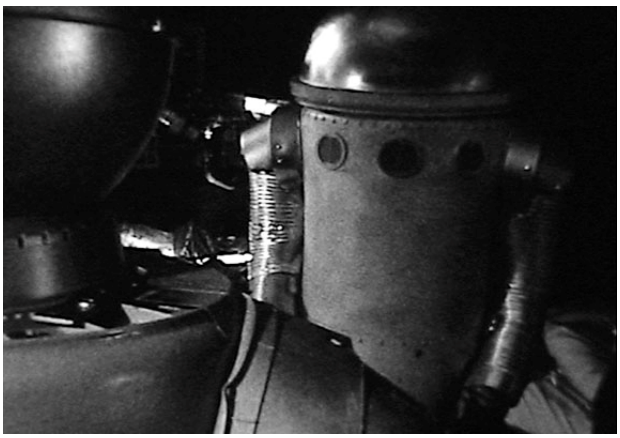
Automatons
R1 DVD
Facets Video



Somewhere in the distant future, there is a girl alone. We don't know her name, perhaps she doesn't either. She lived in an isolated environment underground. The world above having been destroyed by war and pollution. The generations before her have long since died in a war which seems to have continued forever, they first became sterile and then their last clones died, leaving just her and an army of antiquated robots to continue the battle.

She has been programmed from birth to believe in the rightness of her cause, she does not question it, her enemies are less than human and must be exterminated. She continues to send the robots out to fight even though she does not really know what for. Her connection with the past is a series of memories recorded for her by the scientist who looked after as a child. His messages are full of patriotic fervour and become increasing paranoid as they continue throughout the movie. Through these messages we learn about the past and how she has come to be alone fighting a way she did not begin. The scientist is played by Angus Scrimm (the Tall Man of Phantasm) and he is superb in the role. He presents the right mix of menace and political reactionary to be truly scary. This is the voice of utter self righteousness, which believes it is just to destroy the world to save the integrity and sanctity of the West.

The battle is fought through the robots which the enemy regularly turns against her. They have some sort of radio device which they use to send her frightening messages and which turn her own robots against her. She constantly works to block their signals but it is a losing battle.



As the battle increases, she arms her robots with all manner of weapons from chainsaws to knives and sends them out one last time to fight. The robots clash and then they slaughter the remaining enemies. When she finally confronts the enemy, she suddenly realizes that she is not only the last of her people but there are only six people left in the world and she has had them killed, but not before they have triggered a EMF pulse which has disabled all her robots and technology and left her stranded to die.

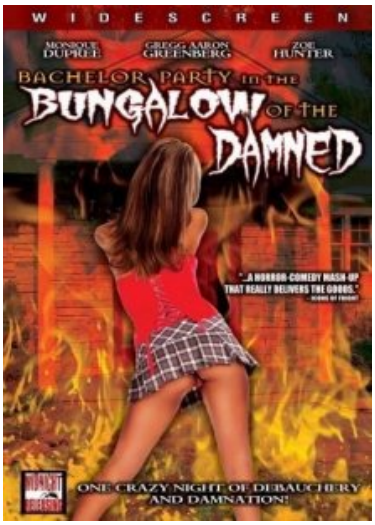
This is a bleak and dark view of the future. It is decidedly retro-futurist even Steampunk, projecting current political conflicts into the future but using the imagery and feel of a Fifties sci-fi film. It is beautifully made in black and white with all the cracks and scratches one would expect from an old film and this gives it quite an amazing look. When you couple this with a powerful, driving electronic soundtrack and some amazing robotic models and puppets you have quite a unique viewing experience. The film certainly has an underlying political message and is not really too subtle about expressing it but at the same time this suites the post apocalyptic tone of the feel and is not out of place.

Automatons is an intelligent film with lots of interesting ideas, painstakingly made with loving attention to every possible detail, it has a great plot, superb ambiance and when you consider that it was made on a low budget you realize just what gems are missing from the mainstream.

Extra includes a 60-minute behind-the-scenes featurette, an interview with Angus Scrimm, Camera and FX tests and a trailer.

Web: http://deathtotheautomatons.com

Bachelor Party in the Bungalow of the Damned
R1 DVD
Mea Culpa Pictures



Chuck is about to get married, so his best friend Sammy decides to give him the ultimate weekend away.

Under the pretence of a golf weekend he arranges a weekend at a luxury bungalow, the only drawback is that he must invite the caretaker, the sexually ambiguous potentially gay Gordon, with whom both Chuck and Sammy have some history. Soon three bodacious babes arrive to do pole dancers for the boys but things soon get out of hand.

It seems these girls have more than a taste for pleasure and are actually demon vampires and soon make mincemeat of two of the men in the worst possible ways. Things only go down here from here as Chuck is bitten and his fiancée is on the way with important news...

Sammy must kill the master vampire to save his friend, but things are not exactly as they seem. It seems in their youth they degraded the local geek, Gordon, but in his emotional anguish he became a vampire, he has been planning his revenge for a lifetime and now his chance has come.

Sammy, of course, cannot see past his prejudice about Gordon and doesn't even consider he could be the master vampire and hence

spends all his title trying to kill the most dominant female vampire only to find it doesn't remedy the situation.

Bachelor Party in the Bungalow of the Damned is an outrageous horror comedy, filled to the brim with sex, gore, offensive jokes and, of course, boobs.
It is well acted, nicely produced and the special effects are cheesy but well done and of course fun. It is a cross between Bachelor Party and the Exorcist with a large dose of "Troma" thrown in for good measure, and is filled with filth and gore, which makes it a real winner.

It knows what it wants to be and doesn't make any pretension to be great art or a high budget film, it revels in its indie status and offers some truly awesome scenes ranging from fiancées with hedge killers to zombie blow jobs, stripper demon vampires and fire stokers rammed into orifices !

The special effects are very successful and are a good combination of professional gore and campy/silly monster effects to make them work.

It has a wicked sense of humour and nicely balances horror with comedy. It is very well acted and has a fine sense of timing; it is also looks damn good too. They even have Lloyd Kaufman from Troma doing a cameo.

This is a great horror comedy romp, filled with all manner of horror, gore, sex, comedy and offensive humour - everything we would want from such a film !

It is great to see what you can do with a low budget, lots of sweat, some inspiration and strippers !

Web: http://www.meaculpapictures.com/

Barbarian Queen
R4 DVD
Big Sky Video
Beyond H.E

Barbarian Queen is also known as the Queen of the Naked Steel and is a stunningly B Grade sword and sorcery tale. Supposedly set during the days of the Roman Empire, it features outrageous dialogue, ridiculous plot twist, silly acting and garish outfits.

A village is raided by Roman troops during the wedding of Argon and his feisty woman Amathea, while most of the villagers are either killed or dragged off as slaves. Amathea, hides under her hut and sets it on fire and hence survives to fight another day. Together with two other scantily clad female warriors they set off to liberate their people.

After various clashes and skirmishes, they are led into an underground location in which rebels live while planning a revolt against the Romans. The rebels have thus far been unwilling to fight, but Amathea gets them all fired up and they together they hatch a plan to overthrow the tyrant.

Along the way Barbarian Queen spends a lot of time focusing on scantily clad women, showing as much tit as possible and at times it seems pre-occupied with women getting manhandled and raped. There are some truly outrageous scenes including one where the torturer is using a metal hand to supposedly "torture" Amathea's breasts and then as he has his way with her she is "too tight" and holds his member captive forcing him to let her go !

Barbarian Queen is literally packed with truly bizarre scenes, the weirdest dialogue one can image and lots of nasty men taking advantage of woman and sexy woman belting up men, Lana Clarkson looks great but I am not sure what more I can say. It is one of those films which is just so damn bad it is good !

I laughed all the way through even though it wasn't made as a comedy ! It is such a B Grade Cult film, it is definitely worth seeing. Extras on the DVD are trailers of a range of other fantasy films from Big Sky Video, the trailer for The Perils of Gwendoline in the Land of the Yik Yaks has to be seen to be believed !

Batman: The Dark Knight
R4 DVD
Warner Bros 2008

Batman has always been an enigmatic and shadowy superhero, even with the earlier series (if we overlook the camp Batman and Robin of the Sixties), he was a figure whose experience of the world was created as a result of intense personal pain and suffering.

While Superman was "Mr.Clean" coming from another planet and never compromised when dealing out justice, Batman was a more idiosyncratic if not flawed and emotionally bruised vigilante.

The more recent Batman films have ranged from the sublime to the average, Tim Burton certainly offered us a dark and Gothic vision but while beautiful to look at it did lack a certain visceral punch. Batman Begins was more of a move in the right direction, showing a disturbed and pained Bruce Wayne, but with Dark Knight the Batman myth really comes into its own.

I must admit I encountered this film with some trepidation, it was heavily marketed and the sad death of Heath Ledger also brought a lot of pressure on the film to be way above average. I wondered if the Dark Knight could live up to the preview clips and images which floated around the internet. I must say I was suitably surprised, if not a little shell-shocked.

The dark and polished Gothicism of Gotham city is replaced with a fetid crime ridden city

In Dark Knight Batman raises the stakes in his war on organised crime by marking currency which the Gotham underworld have been laundering through certain banks. With the help of Lieutenant Jim Gordon and District Attorney Harvey Dent, they trace the funds, target the major crime gangs and arrest them all on a RIKO conspiracy indictment.

When an international banker tries to nestle in on the action and offer a solution to the local "bank crisis", Wayne, using the cover of a Russian Ballet troupe, goes to Hong Kong and in a thrilling and brazen scene, captures and returns the banker to Gotham. However, another criminal is lurking in the background and is able to shatter the illusion of Gotham's safety in a truly breathtaking and brutal manner - the Joker.

which could be any urban landscape, the villains are credible and the joker is suitably disturbed. Ledger's portrayal of a criminal on the brink of madness is nothing short of astounding and works as a perfect counterpoint to the dark heart which exists within Bruce Wayne. At the same time there is no simplistic "Good vs. Evil" in the Dark Knight, the scene where Batman barricades the door and essential beats The Joker to a pulp to get the information he needs, make it clear that both The Joker and Batman have gone way beyond their normal limits.

In many ways the speech The Joker gives about the nature of himself and Batman as "freaks", always "outsiders" and never really trusted, only wanted when needed and then discarded was not only poetic and expressive but insightful. There are so many themes and motifs throughout this film that one could spend a long time

The plot is refined, bringing together themes of conspiracy, organized crime, love and loss and the price of justice to create a powerful cinema experience. This is certainly long film but there is more than enough action to pack three or four movies – ranging from exploding hospitals, out of control semi trailers, gadgets galore and a lot of strong and powerful one-on-one violence.

Heath Ledger as Joker Standing Outside of Jail Cell
© Warner Bros 2008

The acting cannot be faulted, all the characters, major and minor, are exemplary, the film is carried not only by Christian Bale as Batman and Heath Ledger as The Joker, but Gary Oldman as the eccentric Lieutenant Jim Gordon and Maggie Gyllenhaal as Rachel Dawes. Aaron Eckhart is truly moving as the legal warrior but ultimately emotional devastated and mentally destroyed Harvey Dent.

At the same time we should not forget Tech wizard Lucius Fox played superbly by Morgan Freeman and Michael Caine's evocation of Alfred is right on the money.

It could be said this is a “post modern” Batman, gone are the simple shades of morality and we receive a vision of a city on the brink where fire must be used against fire but the price of such a strategy is high. Along the way there are many deaths, the mental and ethical destruction of District Attorney Harvey Dent and ultimately the death of the legend of Batman as he saves the reputation of Gotham Justice at the cost of his own reputation.

All Images
© Warner Bros 2008

Beast of Burden
Mark Joy Films
108 Films
R1 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

108 Pictures is a small independent group in the U.S. Beast of Burden is their latest release. It realizes a short story by Mark Joy of Sam Marra, an FBI agent who has been unable to solve a murder and kidnapping that happened ten years ago.

The clues turned out to be false, and the evidence useless. It was as if he had been led down a false trail. He has been carrying the burden of his failure ever since, affecting his work and ruining his chances for promotion. His marriage has failed and now, under severe pressure, he has just been turned down for promotion again.

Suddenly the abductions start once more, and this time the abductor/killer is leaving him messages. The sites of the abductions are places that he knows well from his boyhood, and it is as if the abductor is inside his head.

Once again, what little evidence there is seems to be useless – paper that doesn’t show up under a microscope, phone calls to 911 in which only the Police side is recorded.

Sam seems to be closing in, but the rate of abductions increases and builds up the pressure on him. Sam starts seeing flashes of the mysterious masked abductor, who seems to be invisible to everyone else. As the age of the victims increases, it looks as if the next victim may be Sam himself.

Sam is played by Mark Joy, a mature and somewhat weathered actor who suits the part perfectly. His serious, professional style reminds me of Lance Henriksen's brilliant performance in "Millennium". Producer Jack Hartmann has done a great job turning Mark's story into a suspenseful short movie.

For all the low budget, it looks highly professional. The extras include "The Beast: Before and After" and "The Making of the Beast" and I am impressed by how limited a budget they had and how well they made the movie in spite of this. They recorded on film not digital media, which was certainly a more expensive and demanding choice, and this has given a beautiful crisp look to the winter scenery that I think would have looked a little dull on digital media.

If I have a criticism, it is that I would like to have seen the movie made about ten minutes longer to fill some of the minor jumps in the plot. As Hartmann pointed out, though, time and budget were limited and there was simply no funding to go back the next day and shoot extra bits. If anything it made me appreciate even more the difficulties of indie film making.

The DVD also has a preview of Dismal, another upcoming release that looks as good as this one, and 108 Pictures' Crazy Like A Fox, their most recent release (Delphi Films). On the strength of this film, I will try to find them.

Special features on the DVD include "The Beast on Location" - Join us for the "Making of The Beast."

"The Beast Before and After" - An honest, insightful reveal of the indie filmmaking process, plus trailers.

Web: http://www.BeastofBurdentheMovie.com

Black Pearl
10,000 A.D.
Indican Pictures
R1 DVD

Black Pearl 10,000 A.D opens with a voice over describing the state of the present day with images of current world problems leading to an atomic catastrophe.

As the world attempts to recover from the attack, it is plunged back into primitivism and what is left of humanity has split into two tribes – The Huron and the Plaebian. The Huron age slower than the Plaebians and hence are more mature and more "spiritually developed". They are a warrior tribe who use meditation and martial training as their way of life. The Plaebians work the valleys attempting to tame the wilderness but are over populated and stretching their resources to the limits and hence suffering from the effect of disease. Soon, however, a new terror arises, the Sinasu which is killing them both.

However, there is a prophecy about a warrior which will arise and defeat the evil. Kurupi, the one who many think will be the warrior, is superbly played and his doubts and inner turmoil are well presented. The climactic scene which reconciles the trials and reveals the real "saviour /warrior" is well thought out and a meaningful plot twist.

I also liked the fact that the "evil one" was one a Huron who thought he was on the side of good;

there is nothing as dangerous as a self righteous crusader!

Black Pearl 10,000 A.D. is a very unusual film, it features beautiful cinematography, a lilting new age music score and enough buff men to fill a beefcake muscle calendar !

The story is told more by images, music and poetry (with some voice over dialogue) than in a narrative manner and is communicated in a mythic form.

I found the martial arts and meditative aspects interesting, but the overemphasis on mysticism and “new age” imagery took away rather than added to the film.

That being said the environmental message within the film was strong and resonant and many of the ideas within the film were certainly thought provoking, even if presently in a way that lacked a certain subtlety.

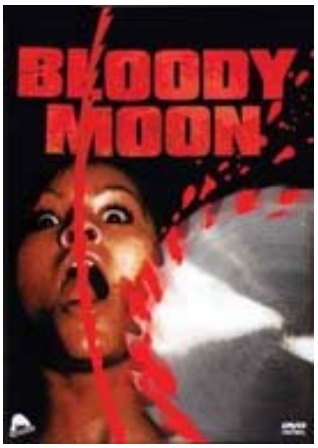
Black Pearl 10,000 A.D. is a visual feast, the crew filmed in some twelve national parks and the canyons, waterfalls and natural landscape is quite awe inspiring, it is certainly quite a background for a film.

The artificial language created for the film also created a unique feel which helped back up the suggestion that this was a post apocalyptic world.

I certainly enjoyed this film and found it unusual and intriguing, it has an interesting plot, excellent cinematography and some thought provoking ideas.

Web: http://www.indicanpictures.com/

Bloody Moon
R0 NTSC
Severin Films 2008



Slasher films are a classic sub class within the horror genre which are much loved by cult film devotees.

They usually have a masked or deformed killer who uses a range of unusual weapons to despatch his and there is usually an element of subterfuge or misdirection so we are not quite sure the killer really is.

Slashers are nearly always accompanied by a strange sort of sexual mortality whereby teens who have illicit sex die first and usually in the most gruesome ways even though the film spends a lot of time using sex as its focus with all manner of lurid imagery.

Slasher films moved into what became known as “body count” films in the early Eighties with John Carpenter's Halloween (1978) and Sean Cunningham's Friday the 13th (1980), which really brought the genre into the mainstream with wallops of blood, gore and sex. Not to be outdone, the maestro of Euro trash cinema Jess Franco created his own spin on the theme with Bloody Moon.

Bloody Moon was censored and cut for many years and this is the first uncut release in the US. Combining both the violence of the Slasher and Franco’s unique approach to sexual dynamics, it is superbly perverse and depraved take on the genre.

Bloody Moon opens with a typical Eighties

party, there is what we expect to see from such a scene - bad dancing, terrible dress sense, disco music and boys trying to get some action, while the girls ask them to wait. Ralph is making out with an unnamed blond and while they are occupied, Miguel steals his Mickey Mouse mask and impersonates him.

He meets a girl dancing alone who thinks he is Ralph and takes him back to her bungalow, however, as he tears off her clothes, she grabs his mask and finds that not only he isn't Ralph he is but is disfigured with a large scar across his face. She screams and he stabs her repeatedly with a pair of scissors in a state of psychotic frenzy. Not a bad opening for a slasher film !

Some years later Miguella is released from a psychiatric ward into the care of his sister, Manuella. He is supposed to be supervised and kept in an environment of loving support. But Manuella has something very different in mind. It seems that Aunt Maria is loaded but not leaving any cash to Manuella and so the next in line is Miguel and she is not happy with that, even though they had an incestuous affair when they were younger !!

The 'International Youth School of Languages Boarding House' is being used by Manuella as a means to try and gain control of her Aunts money and with Miguel at home her plan goes into action.

Along the way we, of course, get lots of topless sunbathing, Antonio, the gardener who seems to also be the local stud ploughing more than just the fields around the property and a population of young girls who while supposedly learning Spanish all look like models and seem more intent on partying and sex !

However, something is amiss and the girls are going missing. First dear old Aunt is burnt to death (though her body seems to continue to be wheeled around the house at night – but that is a revelation kept until the end).

Then one of the girl is knifed through the breast in an especially brutal killing and other girls are killed in all sort of interesting ways. Nobody believes dear Angela (who is now occupying the same bungalow in which Miguel got so enthusiastic years ago) and the disfigured Miguel is always lurking around watching, is he back to his old tricks ?

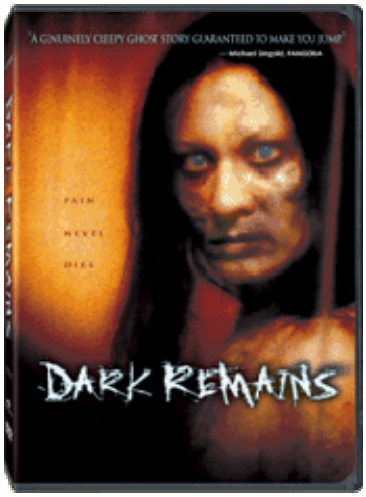
Bloody Moon is a cross genre horror which really mixes together a crime Giallo type film with a slasher presented in inimitable Jess Franco style – as the body count increase we get knives through throats, chainsaws and heads cut off as well as all sorts of twists and turns.

I rather like Bloody Moon and think it offers a nice Euro twist on the Eighties Slasher, the killings are innovative, the music is groovy and the edition of the film is superb.

The colours are gorgeous, it looks great and sounds marvellous, the widescreen presentation from Severin is sharp and clear and better than any edition that has been every released before, it has an English language soundtrack.

Severin Films
Web: Http://www.severin-films.com

Dark Remains
R1 DVD
Monarch
Home Video



Dark Remains is highly successful horror tale which is in many ways much more of a traditional take on the ghost story than the modern adaptations that rely on gore and violence.

It places a strong emphasis on mood, music, character development (with very solid acting) with shocks provided by ghosts appearing in mirrors, out of shadows and when you least expect it. It also has an intriguing plot which unites the story of a grieving couple with the strange darkness of a cabin near an abandoned prison and unexplained deaths.

The story opens with a suicide, we see an unnamed woman slit her wrists in the bath and a man (presumably her husband) blow his brains out.

We then cut to Allen and Julie Pike who put their young girl quietly to bed. When they awaken they find Emma has been brutally murdered while they slept. With no sign of forced entry or leads the police are pointing the finger and Allen and Julie feel angry and lost. They decide to rent an isolated mountain cabin to get away from it all. Allen is a technical book writer and Julie is an accomplished photographer.

As Julie fights her depression, she decides to return to her craft but begins to see images of Emma in the photographs she takes. However, when she shows them to others nobody else sees what she sees. She becomes obsessed with taking these photographs and comes to believe her dead daughter is appearing to her.

At the same time strange things begin to happen in the cabin. When friends come to stay they see a dead woman fall down the stairs and refuse to return. The strange activities begin to accelerate and it is hard to tell whether it is Julie's psychological state deteriorating or whether they are real. Allen begins to investigate the Cabin and finds that ever since the prison has closed everyone who occupied the cabin has died a suspicious death. The local townspeople, however, are less than forthcoming when asked for information, they all seem to know more than they are telling but offer no assistance.

We come to understand that that something horrible occurred around May 22rd some years before when the jail closed and that each year people die around the same date, the deaths also all seem connected to a strange and eccentric local, Jim.

As the movie progresses, there are lots of impressive shocks and jumps. The ghosts are impressively nerve wracking and while the film does rely heavily on these episodes, the plot, acting and mood make it a superior supernatural thriller. The ghosts look great being played by real people showing various forms of decay and with deathlike grimaces.

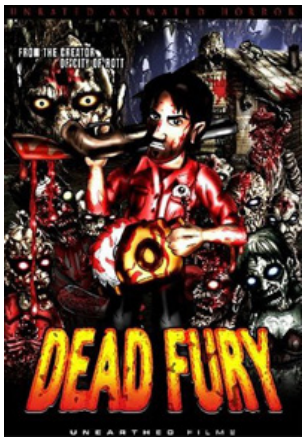
The way in which the couple's grief and the story about a local tragedy are intertwined is especially successful and the locations in the film are very well used. The cabin looks so sublime and marvellous, it is no abandoned house, yet as time goes on it becomes such a nexus of terror. Then there is the abandoned jail next door which is such a superbly ghostly location that it is truly terrifying.

Dark Remains is a masterly ghost story, nicely told, well acted and using great locations and music. As an independent film it is a testament to how a good ghost story should be told.

Brian Avenet-Bradley has been making indie films for some years and this is his most accomplished and impressive to date and is really such an achievement that it stands out from the many big budget ghost films released by Hollywood.

Web: http://www.monarchvideo.com

Dead Fury
Unearthed Films
R1 DVD



Some years ago I remember seeing an underground animated zombie flick called City of Rott, it was very different from anything I had seen before and was funny and horrific at the same time, it was packed with gore, violence and blood and guts and had a wicked sense of style. Its animation was quirky, primitive and visceral and it achieved quite some success on the cult circuit.

Frank Sudol has followed City of Rott with Dead Fury which is another eccentric take on the horror genre. Clearly influenced by such horror films as The Evil Dead, Texas Chainsaw Massacre to The Hill Have Eyes it has a truly vicious sense of humour and some awesome if not idiosyncratic animation.

In Dead Fury we meet Max and his mates who have decided to go hunting. They do not want to drive too far outside town to where they can legally hunt and so have crept onto a supposedly empty property to bag themselves some deer. However, things do not go as planned, the property is occupied a demons who possess anyone who trespasses on their land.

As soon as the film begins you know you are in for a gorefest – possession includes eyes popping out, buckets of blood and evil bodily transformations and these creatures cannot be easily killed, so max and his friends have a real battle on their hands.

Dead Fury is a strange, dark and perverse animated film with a unique comic book style, a great sense of humour, strange characters and as much carnage as it can muster.

It is funny, entertaining and times unbelievably violent. While perhaps an acquired taste it is certainly quite a unique horror experience.

Dead Fury also comes with a superb commentary, a making of documentary and some forty minutes of deleted and extended scenes.

Web: http://www.unearthedfilms.com

Dead Space: Downfall
Blu Ray
Starz
Anchor Bay 2008

Dead Space is Electronic Art's much anticipated horror game which is a third person shooter and action game released for the PC and Xbox 360. It is a powerful and immersive experience and has received rave reviews. In conjunction with the game the backstory has been expanded into a visceral and dark full length animated feature film.

The film opens with the discovery of a large stone relic on Aegis 7, it is a cold, bleak and barren world except for a small colony. Working close by is the USG Ishimura which is essentially a mining ship, in this future time mining has taken to the stars and entire dead planets are pulled apart to extract ores and metals. However, it seems the captain and others have a secret mission which is to take on board the stone relic, which many believe has religious significance, and return it to earth.

Strange things occur as soon as the relic is removed; the colony experiences an immediate spike in crime with an explosion of murder and suicides. As soon as the relic is brought on board the Ishimura, the same spike occurs. At first it seems like some sort of "space madness" or pathogen as crew members become paranoid and attack each other and themselves but then the dead bodies of the crew begin to transform and it becomes obvious something else is loose on the ship.

A small batlike creature feeds on the corpses and after injecting something into their foreheads they transform into monsters with fangs, claws sticking out of their sides and spikes in

their palms. They have a ferocious appetite for human flesh. The creatures also seem to take all manner of forms depending on their original hosts and hence vary from huge bulky flesh eaters to flying children with teeth !

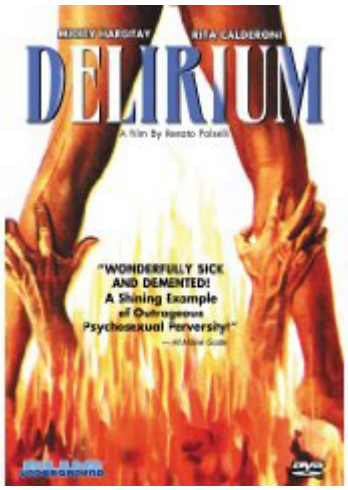
As the relic gains control of the ship, jettisoning the escape crafts and manipulating the computer, the final battle between the small security team and the creatures unfolds.

Dead Space: Downfall is a startling, violent and very adult animated film. It is beautifully made with superbly textured backgrounds and images, intense colour and believable characters. The language is adult, the gore is quite extreme and the plot is a mixture of everything from Aliens to The Thing. The level of gore and the pure innovative nature of the violence is impressive, the creatures are superbly revolting and the intensity of the film as a work of animated cinema is remarkable. I am not one for computer games so have not seen the game so am judging the film purely as a work of animation, and on that level alone it is very successful. The colours on Blu Ray are amazing, there is the highest level of clarity and the shades of greys and browns really stand out as does the constant splatters of blood red !

When you look at the relic and see all the small textured figures all over its grey surface, you realize just how flawless the presentation is. I also noticed little things that impressed me such as the textures of the planet's surface and the various shades of browns on their suits. All of these qualities really showed off the nature of high definition animation on Blu Ray. The sound is very atmospheric and really sustains the mood with all sorts of sound effects ranging from the sounds of the creatures attacking to doors opening and closing.

Extras include some trailers, an isolated soundtrack and the Art of Dead Space which includes conceptual paintings, sketches, CG models, comic book pages, background art, and schematics. Dead Space: Downfall also includes a portable copy of the movie on a second disc.

Delirium
R0 DVD
Blue Underground
2008



Delirium is a sleazy and outrageous work of cinema by the Italian film-maker Renato Poselli, he originally released it under the non-de-plume Ralph Brown. However, in Italy it was well known he was the director where it was released as Hot Delirium.

Herbert Lyutak (Mickey Hargitay) is a forensic psychologist who works alongside the police as a consultant profiler. He also has some major problems of his own; he is impotent and can only achieve satisfaction through sexual violence usually associated with strangulation.

The film opens as he is sitting alone in a bar. A young woman is playing music on the jukebox; he only seems to notice her legs. His face twitches and his attention is locked on her alone, the camera is focused on her legs, we do not even see who she is for some time. He offers her a lift to a local night club. However, she notices the way he stares obsessively at her, he grabs her, assaults her and then chases her into the river where he tears off her clothes while strangling her, to make sure the job is done right he smashes her head with a rock.

When he returns home we meet his wife Marcia, she suspects her husband is involved in the killings, especially after she finds a bloodied dress locked in a box. However, she is submissive and obsessively devoted to her husband so stands by him. Indeed she offers him the right to do "whatever he wants with her". He seems obsessed with her neck and partially suffocates her, he then anally penetrates her with some sort of metal object.

These two characters, Dr.Lyutak and his wife, are superbly portrayed, they are credible and believable. The way in which Lyutak's face twitches and twists, contorting with anger and rage, embodies his internal turmoil. The unquestioning devotion of his wife and her utter submission is disconcerting.

There is lots of weirdness in Delirium - sex, nudity, bungled police investigations, visions of lesbian nuns, sodomy and, of course, strangulation. There is an excellent electronic score and some great cinematography, this is certainly at the exploitation end of the Giallo genre.

This edition from Blue Underground includes both the original Italian release which comes in at 102 minutes and the re-edited American release of 85 minutes. The Italian release is much longer and is the original as envisioned by Poselli.

The American release was heavily edited, including the addition of a Vietnam war sequence (!) and two extra murders as well as a very different ending. The Italian version seems to embody Poselli's vision of a disturbed killer, driven by desires he cannot control, while the American version is much more "black and white" simply painting him as a psychopathic murderer.

The cultural significance of these cinematic differences is worthwhile noting, the Italians seem more interested in the nuances of human experience and trying to understand the psychology of murder, while many American films seen content with a simple "good versus evil" approach.

The major extra is the "The Theorem Of Delirium" which is a selection of interviews with Writer/Director Renato Polselli and Star Mickey Hargitay.

Devil Hunter
R0 NTSC
Severin Films

Jess Franco is a prolific filmmaker, he has made some 100 films which vary in quality and content, however, a reoccurring theme is heavy eroticism tinged with exploitation. His films have always been saturated with sex, nudity, sado masochism, incest and whatever else he can get away with !

Franco always seems to have his "finger on the pulse" and quickly develops films in response to market demands ranging from Slashers to vampire erotica. In the case of Devil Hunter he saw the developing taste for cannibal films and developed his own take on the genre mixing the natural exploitation of undiscovered tribes with a wild cannibal god and his own focus on the female form.

Originally a "video nasty" and known under various titles such as Mandingo Manhunter and Sexo Cannibal, Devil Hunter is certainly an exploitative tale of dubious quality, indeed, it's main selling point is its purely exploitative nature, it does not offer much in the way of acting or character development. But, to be honest, who watches a Jess Franco exploitation film for the deep and meaningful plot ?

It is a cult classic and worth seeing on that basis alone.

The film opens with two storylines. We see a native tribe kidnapping and preparing a native girl for sacrifice, a strange, large black man with bulging eyes, rapes her and then eats her. At the same time we see a rich, well to do model buying clothes in the city, having her photography taken and preparing for a private showing of custom designed outfits.

These two stories soon intertwine, as the model is kidnapped and taken by plane to an isolated island where she is kept for ransom. Ursula Buchfellner (a Playboy playmate) is cast as Laura Crawford the kidnapped model and plays the role well, she looks the part, is kept scantily clad for most of the time and has little dialogue, perhaps that is why her role works so well !

Little do the kidnappers know that this island is also home to a tribe who worships a bug eyed god who is actually a strange large man with bulging red eyes who wanders naked and aimless around the island, raping and killing at random by eating his victim's hearts ! The two stories and cultures, as one may suspect, collide in exploitative frenzy !

Franco filled Devil Hunter with as much nudity as he could, ranging from lurid slow camera angles over naked bodies and scenes in which the only motive could be seen as to show some more flesh. I think this is what make Devil Hunter so endearing, it is unapologetically over the top, the plot is thin, the characters stereotypical and you watch for the sheer glee of seeing the gore, nudity and exploitation.

That being said, Franco is a consummate filmmaker and Devil Hunter looks great, the location allows for some great cinematography and the lush look of the film makes the eccentricities of the natives costuming and dancing look less obvious.

Severin have done a superb job on a very rare film, while the picture is a little dark and soft in parts, compared to any other release of this film it is amazing.

Devil Hunter is one of the most rare Franco titles and has never really have a high quality uncut release and hence we are very lucky to have this title made available by Severin. Devil Hunter not only includes the English audio track (which is in itself rather amusing with some very strange accents and truly bizarre dialogue) but the better French audio with English subtitles.

The extra is an extended interview with Jess Franco himself.

Web: http://www.severin-films.com

Edges of Darkness
Distribution via Shoreline Entertainment
Web: http://www.shorelineentertainment.com
Web: http://www.edgesofdarkness.com

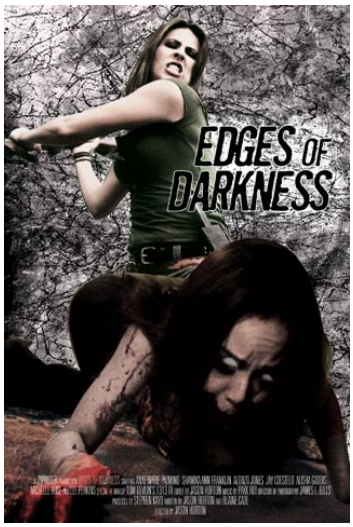
Edges of Darkness is a strange, even surreal series of interlocking horror tales set amidst the apocalypse when zombies roam the streets and society has collapsed into ruins. The first twenty minutes or so offers a bloody exploration of the zombie ridden state of the world with lots of flesh eating, limb tearing and general gore ridden madness. Then we focus in on a couple holed up in an apartment. They seem like a nice average couple under quite some stress from the zombie onslaught.

They haven't eaten in days and the husband Stan, promises wife Stellie, he will retrieve some food he has been able to get hold of and has stored in the car when he can. We then realize that the story is a little darker than we first thought, their food source is a young girl and we realize Stan and Stellie are vampires. However, as they feed on their young prey, it seems things are not as they seem and soon her captors are becoming weaker and weaker every time they feed.

Dean and Dana are a young married couple. However, they are not as happy as they once were. Dean is so obsessed with his writing (which strangely seems to mirror the stories which are unfolding), that he is cold to the death and destruction around him and is alienating his young wife. Indeed Dana has become so isolated that she talks to a zombie who visits her window and, in a rather surreal dream sequence, dreams of escaping with the undead to alleviate her boredom.

Dean receives a new computer chip in the post and after installing it strange and mysterious

things begin to occur. It seems that this processor can run without electricity by searching for any available life force and that includes, ultimately, Dean himself…



As the stories Intertwine, we meet Heather who is a true survivor; she has battled the zombies and learned to stay alive at any cost. She finds Shamika, a young mother and her young son Marcus in trouble and having lost her own son to zombies, saves them and takes them to her home.

We soon learn that Marcus is actually the Anti-Christ and that the zombies are God's means of purifying the planet. (As Marcus so eloquently explains, he did it before with Noah and the Flood and is doing it again) Heather now decides to protect young Marcus from a strange cult of priests out to kill him in the hope to sustaining life on earth !

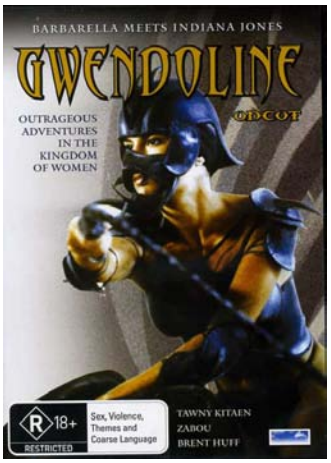
Edges of Darkness is clearly a low budget film but shows buckets loads of innovation and creativity. It packs in the blood and gore, looks excellent, has some truly superb sound effects (the cracking of bones and splintering of heads never sounded so good) and certainly sustains the action.

Many low budget films have problems with wooden acting and questionable performances, no such hassle here, everyone is more than up to the job and there is actually some fairly impressive character development. The vampire couple, for example, are not just "vampires" but are fleshed out with their own unique personalities, follicles and dispositions.

The plot is intriguing and mixes together three different strange tales into the background zombie story. It is an unusual film which is a little hard categorize on as it mixes a high gore zombie film with a series of "Creepshow like tales".

This makes “Edges of Darkness” a decidedly strange yet very successful cult horror film.

Gwendoline
Big Sky DVD 2008
R4 DVD
Distributed by
Beyond Home Entertainment



Gwendoline also known as Perils of Gwendoline or Perils of Gwendoline in the Land of the Yik Yaks is a truly stupendous cult experience. It was made by Just Jaeckin of Story of O and Emmanuelle fame and based on a original comic book by John Willie which was saturated with Bondage, S & M and all manner of quirky eroticism. However, for some very strange reasons, Jaeckin decided to make Gwendoline a comedy and so while it has all sorts of erotic elements, lots of breast shots and certainly some strange bondage moments, it is more in the spirit of Barbarella or a light sex comedy than his earlier films. It is interesting to note that this was the last film Jaeckin ever made and after you watch it, I think you will realize why. This must have been a fairly expensive film to make with scenes short in Morocco, the Philippines, L.A. and in other locations around the world. It also features very elaborate sets and costumes which would have been costly to create and they certainly look marvellous, but it really didn’t work at the cinema. Many years later it is seen as a cult classic- the dialogue is ridiculous, the acting is uneven, the outfits outrageous and the action adventure meets sex explorer storyline is strange to say the least, yet all these elements work together to make Gwendoline a truly unique cult film experience.

The plot centres on Gwendoline (Tawny Kitaen), she had stowed away in a cargo crate to China as she wants to locate her lost father who has vanished during a search for a rare butterfly in the land of the Yik Yaks. Chinese thieves get to her before her friend and kidnap her. Willard (Brent Huff), however, reluctantly saves her when he goes to collect his pay from a Chinese crime lord and she happens to be tied to a chair. To retrieve his pay, he ends up killing the crime lord and his deputies and hence they must all escape from the jail quick smart. Gwendoline is obviously attracted to Willard, but Willard is far more interesting in smuggling and having a good time but knows

that he must hightail it out of town to avoid the authorities. Now, Gwendoline, her friend Beth and Willard are on their way to find her father after Gwendoline offers Willard $2,000 for his assistance. Little does he know the cash has come from smuggled goods she had "borrowed" from him and bartered for cash !

The film moves through different locales with lightning speed, one moment we are in a jungle, then a desert, then a plain. It is much like a strange road trip movie as they encounter illegal traders, tribesman, poison clouds and finally, a lost Amazonian tribe in the land of the Yik Yak.

The last section is truly the most bizarre with a kingdom where woman wear outfits which look like bondage and latex suits, a queen who looks like she is wearing drag and prisoners are punished with gigantic sci-fi machines which look like a cross between something from Metropolis and sex toys. In this kingdom the woman must kill any man they have sex with and they fight for the privilege to do so !

There is lots of soft-core footage and titillation but certainly none of the sexuality of Jaeckin's earlier films. You need to experience Gwendoline for yourself to really appreciate what a truly mad work of cinema it is.

It is silly, fun, sometimes sexy, always bizarre and will keep you enthralled and amused throughout, at the end you will wonder how such an insane film ever got made at all !

Halloween 30th
Anniversary Box Set
Anchor Bay 2008

Halloween celebrated its thirtieth anniversary this year and to celebrate Anchor Bay has released a special edition set. It is hard to overestimate the effect Halloween has had on the history of horror. When John Carpenter first made this relatively low budget film nobody realized how it would revolutionize horror cinema or the number of sequels it would spawn. Carpenter certainly never realized now many copies and adaptations would be made, none ever came close to the sheer originality of Halloween.

The Box set is a nice collectible and include a small Michael Myers mask as well as a number of versions of Halloween, Halloween four and five and a superb full length documentary. The original Halloween film is offers as a standard DVD, a blu ray high definition edition (which incidentally is region free and will play worldwide) and the extended edition of Halloween.

It is fair to say that if you have most of these films already, there isn't a lot extra which would make you run out and buy this. However, as a collection it is good value. It is available at a number of places online (such as Amazon and Deep Discount DVD) for $49.95 US and considering it includes a Blu Ray edition of the film this is very reasonable. Sure, the mask included is a bit gimmicky, but as a way to get all these items in one package it is still worth dollars.

The Blu Ray edition of Halloween is truly astounding; the colours are brilliant and the music certainly works well especially with the uncompressed audio track. The Blu Ray is not "region coded" and plays worldwide.

The documentary Halloween 25 Years of Terror is comprehensive and examines all the different Halloween films with lots of interviews and candid discussions of the trials and tribulations of the story of Michael Myers as it traversed 25 years of cinema.

The package all includes lots of extras, the films all include audio commentaries and there are various featurettes, panel discussions, interviews and footage.

Hella Crazy I & II
Beyond Home Entertainment
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

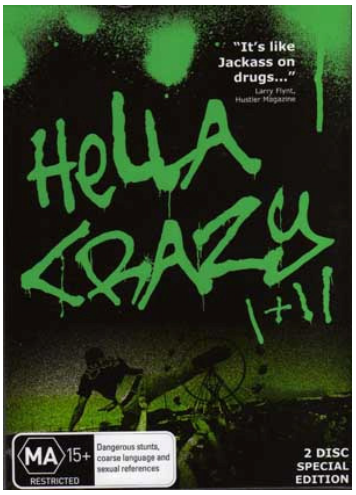
I can't help thinking that this series was inspired by "MythBusters", but was one of those "hold my beer and watch this" things rather than a serious but light-hearted investigation. There is no "what happens if I set fire to myself and jump off the roof?". They just go and do it, without any preparation or thought for safety or the consequences.

It's more like an amateurish version of "Jackass" for less mature kids. The antics (it's hard to call many of them "stunts") are so completely pointless and downright stupidly dangerous that initially I wasn't going to lose two hours out of my life watching them. They are the sort of irrational behaviour that features so much on YouTube, and usually ends up with someone getting seriously hurt. Then I realised that many of these ARE the ones on YouTube. Probably against my better judgment I kept watching, to find out what sort of people would do this..

First, the theory behind the action (or as the cover puts it "daredevil-like stunts") is that it's cool to do something suicidal even if you have no idea of what's going to happen. It's even cooler if you hurt yourself. Coolest of all is broken bones, and attendances by ambulances or police. It takes a particularly strange individual to see this as "cool", but the Gaboff Brothers, the main talentless idiots in the show, apparently think this is so. They are basically mindless fools who swear, fight, and do really stupid things.

The genuine stunts on BMX, quad bikes, or motorbikes show that some members of the team have real potential and talent. The two DVDs show what happens as they develop their skills – not all the trial runs are going to be successful, and the crashes are often spectacular. Some of the skateboard stunts finish in disaster, too, but at least they are not totally without merit. Executed well, they can be quite spectacular. Its just that the DVDs concentrate on the spectacular crashes.

The discipline and balance of the riders contrast with the utter stupidity of the Gaboff Brothers. Is it a stunt to run off the roof of your house and jump into a tall tree some yards away? And have your mates follow you, until one has nowhere to go but down onto the ground (and serious injury)? Is it really a stunt to shoot fireworks at an unprotected member of the team until, inevitably, he gets burnt? One member, who calls himself "Bobby Pyro",



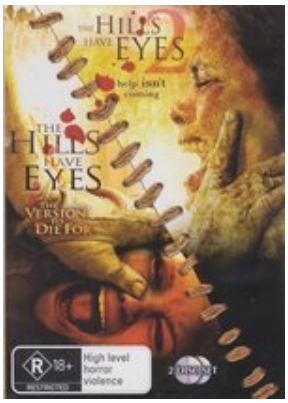
specializes in pouring petrol on people and setting them on fire so their "stunt" will look more spectacular. These silly little children (most in their late teens) are aided and abetted by their equally mindless overindulgent parents who feel that the boys are old enough to know what they are doing, and actually seem perversely proud of them. Thankfully the kids haven't discovered guns yet.

The second DVD is even more incoherent than the first. The soundtrack is louder, the participants less rational, and the Gaboff Brothers seem to revel in their newfound public coolness. There is an undue concentration on the crew's appearances in public, lap dances and lightly clad girls. It's one of those giggly juvenile things. About twenty minutes into this I gave up and turned it off.

There is a positive side to the DVDs. Some will complain that it will encourage their kids to jump off tall buildings after setting themselves on fire, and this may be true – the Gaboffs were once (and probably still are) weak-minded silly children too. On the other hand, perhaps the sight of the blood , injuries and pain may convince kids that this sort of silliness is not really cool after all, and to think of the consequences of their acts. For adults who have outgrown this sort of thing, it's a lot of fun to watch a bunch of morons hurt themselves. It's one of those "thank heavens it's not me" movies.

I just don't know if I could recommend this for a bit of light viewing or not. If you have had a few beers and want something to watch, "Actiongirls" has a better plot (and it has none at all) and good looking women. It's probably safer not to let the kids see this one. With luck, the Gaboff brothers will kill themselves before they breed. Or make a third DVD.

The Hills Have Eyes – Unrated Edition
R4 DVD
Fox 2006



Available in a 2 DVD Set with The Hills Have Eyes II.

The original "The Hills Have Eyes" was released in 1977 and directed by Wes Craven. It was a bizarre and violent film, made on a limited budget and focused on the clash between inbred country folk with a penchant for human flesh and urban city dwellers. Over the years it has become a cult classic, helped along by its dark sense of humour and Craven's superb visual sense of cinema. In this remake Wes Craven returns, this time as producer with the celebrated Alexandre Aja as director. Aja already illustrated what he could with "Haute Tension", a terrifying film which matched a paranoid and twisted plot with breathtaking brutality and violence, just what was needed for a reworking of this classic film. While many fans of the original will steadfastly refuse to watch this remake, I think this is a mistake, while there are many dismal remakes of classic horror films, this remake shows immense creativity and offers quite a stunning reworking of the original film in terms of both plot and cinematography.

The introduction to the main tale is quite breathtaking. We see footage of the New Mexico atomic tests intermixed with images of deformed children, all to an upbeat Fifties sound track. It is confronting and leaves you quite disturbed. The music changes to a harsh sound as each deformity is shown, prior to this we are shown an information scene outlining when and where the tests were undertaken and the fact that the US government has never accepted responsibility for any possible ill effects.

This use of the nuclear tests and the deformities it causes is the backbone of the film and adds a truly disturbing layer to the plot. As the story unfolds we learn that the town where the tests were undertaken was originally a mining settlement and refusing to leave the miners simply went underground.

The government ignored their plight and went ahead with the tests anyway and what resulted was shocking indeed. While most of the miners some survived and as their community continued the deformities that resulted were horrific. The graphic imagery of deformed and twisted faces and limbs is testament to the effectiveness of special effects. As the effected miners try to survive and their fury at the "outsider world" increases, they capture travellers going through their territory and live off their wealth, property and.... flesh.

This background story may create a certain level of sympathy for the miners but not for long, the sheer brutality of their attacks and the rape, torture and violence that they inflict against the family which is central to the film is brutal, to say the least.

The plot itself centres around Big Bob, a retired detective who has decided to take his family on a trip through the New Mexico desert before taking his new job in a private security firm. The family includes the overtly religious wife Ethel, the married daughter Lynne and her husband Doug, who sell mobile phones and their infant daughter Caroline. There are also the two teenagers, Brenda and Bobby. Along for the ride are two gorgeous German Shepherds, Beauty and Beast.

The family are travelling in a large American caravan loaded with food and goods for the trip. After stopping at a service station, Ethel notices a bag of jewels and other goods in the back office. While she doesn't say anything, the owner of the station notes her attention and gives them a short cut to California. It seems he receives these goods as "gifts" from his inbred children in the desert and he will do what he can to protect them. Big Bob ignoring good sense decides to take the scenic short cut and drives the family off into the desert.

As the family drive along the winding dirt road, the car suddenly spins out of control and

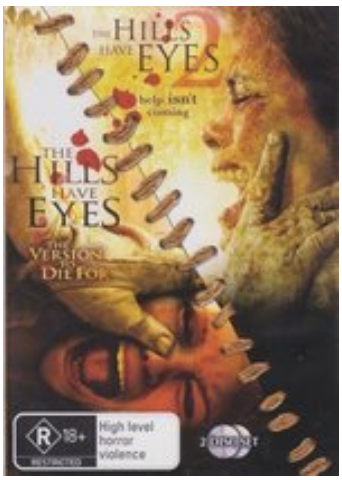
crashes, it is write off. What they do not realize is that the accident was caused by a “tribe” of cannibal mutants, who live and bred in the shadow of the atomic war site. Doug and Bob set off for help, while the others set up a meal in “holiday mode” - little do they know what they are in for.

The cinematography of the film is quite superb, it is a visual feast of colour, textures and symbols, all reinforcing the brutal battle between the two families – the urban family on their way to a better life and the desert family struggling to survive. There are certainly poignant moments which make one reflect on how this struggle began, especially when “Big Bob” is taken down into the mines. The imagery of the atomic test site populated by test dummies and the icons of Fifties wealth juxtaposed with the deformities of the people living among them is profound. However, the cannibals have degenerated so far that there is only a dim memory of humanity left and the clash is brutal, violent and cruel.

This is an extreme film, the scenes of violence are very realistic and at times very confronting, the “primal” scene when the daughter is raped, the mother killed and baby stolen is truly shocking, it is all the more powerful in that it is the first time you really get to see the enemy close up. At times it could be said that the violence becomes too outlandish and even bit “comic book” - it becomes just so over the top you turn off. I found this especially occurred during the final battle between Doug, who had transformed from mobile phone geek to “Warrior”, and the mutant who has his child.

However, that being said, this is a visceral, confronting yet haunting film and while many remakes fail to hit the mark, this one is certainly successful. The combination of Craven and Aja has produced a brutal and confronting experience which many may not stomach, for those willing to take a journey to the darker side of human nature, this is well worth the price of admission.

The Hills Have Eyes II
Unrated Edition
R4 DVD
Fox 2007



Released in a 2 DVD set with The Hills have Eyes 2.

Personally I thought it would be difficult to follow on from the sheer brutality of The Hills Have Eyes I and on watching the sequel it seems I was right. While the combination of Wes Craven as the writer and Martin Weisz as the Director creates a suspenseful but not especially subtle sequel, it certainly lacks the look, feel and depth of the first film.

Not only is the sequel primarily an action film, but it also lacks a lot of the intelligent sub text which made the first film so notable. It should also be said that while Alexandre Aja was able to give the first film a incredible look through superior cinematography, this seems to have been totally overlooked in the sequel.

A team is sent into Region 16 to install surveillance devices after the disappearance of a family travelling through the region (i.e. the first remake). One of the devices they are installing is damaged by a rat and they order a replacement. At the same time we are introduced to a National Guard squad undertaking a training exercise and failing miserably. They are a motley crew and seem to have more problems that the most dysfunctional family.

When they arrive they cannot find the tech team and things soon go from bad to worse.

Their jeep is blown up, their guns are stolen and they find one of the tech team locked in the latrine (literally IN the latrine).

The battle lines are soon drawn between the mutants and the squad in a battle for survival. A lot of the action takes place down in the mines and this certainly adds to the suspense - dark, cramped spaces, mutants, a rape, gore, blood, guts and lots of violence certainly creates an action packed experience. At times these sequences remind me of Descent and certainly the claustrophobic mood adds to the experience.

However, there is a real lack of finesse and subtlety in this sequel, even though the first film was extraordinarily violent, there was a certain intelligence to the plot which is missing here. The character development is also nowhere near as good and the special effects are quite second rate.

When you compare how impressive the mutants looked in the first film, these creatures, at times, simply look like actors wearing Halloween masks.

There is lots of action and certainly the suspense created works and it offers an enjoyable 90 minute horror romp, but there is nothing especially innovative or creative and it certainly cannot be compared to The Hills Have Eyes I.

A very enjoyable extra was the documentary on The Hill Have Eyes: The Beginning, a graphic novel which has been written to explore the back story before the two films, it looks very impressive and well worth looking out for.

I wouldn't run out and get this film, however, if you can pick up the dual pack of The Hills Have Eyes I and II at a good price then it is worth watching it simply as an action horror film, as long as you don't compare it to the first film. It does offer a lot of scares and some nice suspense but just don't expect too much.

The Horror Vault
R0 NTSC DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

A 110-minute set of short stories covering some of humanity's worst traits – insanity, murder, torture, and more. Some of the stories didn't do much for me, and some are obviously made on a low budget, but the quality of the direction and the scripts and the skilled performances by many of the actors and actresses make up for this.

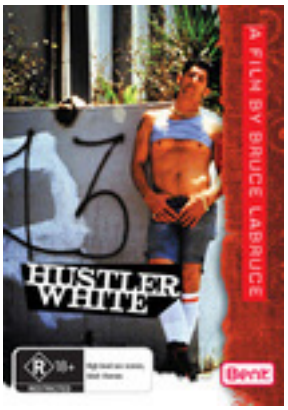
I can't summarize the plots without giving too much away, since a short story by its very nature can't carry too much of a plot. In spite of this, some stories deserve special mention. I particularly liked Josh Card and David Boone's "Disconnected", a graphic and gruesome little torture comedy. Yes, it's a hard combination to imagine, but watch the movie and you will see what I mean. "Alone" has the classic horror ingredients of waking up by yourself in empty house, with unfamiliar things happening. Mandy Amano particularly gives a good performance. Drew English and Gabriel Dowrick's "Echoes" follows a similar line, with a man waking up strapped into a bed with no knowledge of what he is doing there or what is going on - until the real nightmare begins. Sean Seuthorp turns in a brilliant performance, considering that all he does is lie there and suffer.

Although many of the casts have some film or TV experience behind them, the writers, producers and directors are almost unknown. The Horror Vault series gives them a chance to show their talents. Some will have a good career ahead of them, and I can only commend the Horror Vault for giving them an airing.

The Horror Vault itself is a low-budget operation, selling by mail order from their website. They have trailers available which give you some idea of what you are in for, but the trailers can't do justice to the quality of some of the work. The Horror Vault 2 has already been released, and it's worth keeping an eye on their website for future releases.

Web: http://www.thehorrorvault.net

Hustler White
Kojo Films
R4 DVD
Distributed by Beyond Home Entertainment



Sexual anthropologist Jürgen Anger (played by Bruce La Bruce) flies in to LA to begin research for a new book on the seedy side of gay sex in Hollywood. He is clearly modelled on Kenneth Anger (of Hollywood Babylon and various gay cult films), yet repeatedly denies it throughout the film giving his character an ironic twist. At the same time Montgomery (Monti to his friends) works the street, after plying his trade with a well built bearded bear, he steals his wallet and car, running over another sex work in the process, crushing his foot as he drives back and forth trying to escape. A scene of grotesquely funny humour.

At that moment Jurgen sees him at a distance and falls instantly in love, he grabs the blood stained body shirt Monti has left behind and its becomes a fetish of his desire. These two characters and their chess game of lust and desire and perhaps love form the backbone of the film, at first Monti thinks Jurgen is a cop trying to arrest him but then is hired by Jurgen to lead him through Hollywood as a guide to the sex underground. They finally come together but only after Monti nearly dies hitting his head in Jurgen's spa pool and Jurgen takes his limp body to the beach to dispose of it, Monti only regaining consciousness just in time !

What makes this strange love story so fascinating is that Bruce La Bruce does not portray sex in a clean and rarefied fashion, it is filled with all manner of fetishes, strange desires, fears, neurosis' and, of course, finally love and companionship. Bruce La Bruce is the enfant terrible of Gay filmmaking. His movies are always controversial ranging from his confronting early skin head sex films to his more recent Gay Zombie spectacular Otto. The look of Hustler White is also helped by the collaboration of Rick Castro, a Los Angeles erotic and fetish photographer.

Of course, Bruce La Bruce always portrays sex explicitly and likes to shock as well as amuse. Hustler White must hold the record for the sheer abundance of fetishes shown from Amputee Fetishism to a funeral director who likes to bind young men in masking tape. From a Cowboy who wants to literally saddle up and ride his rent boys to drag, leather, Sado-Masochism and Bondage and Discipline.

Hustler White is really a dark comedy which uses sexual extremes to confront and entertain. There are no doubts there are some very politically incorrect scenes, the scene in which a young white male hustler (played by well known American porn star Kevin Kramer), is taught some lessons in "black power" by being drilled by some eight, ten (I lost count !) black men is totally over the top and one is not sure whether to be horrified or amused.

Hustler White is also a massive "inside joke" as well, Bruce La Bruce plays Jurgen Anger, Tony Ward, a well known male model (featured in the Madonna sex videos) is Monti, many of the rent boys are real porn stars or respected gay performances. There are also other fun cameos, for example, the Cowboy fetishist is Stew Blake, a very well known gay country and western singer!

To enjoy Hustler White you need a very broad and raucous sense of humour, for me that is the joy of Bruce La Bruce, he creates films in which we can laugh at ourselves and the thing which people take so seriously - sex. La Bruce presents sex as fun, dirty and quirky, sometimes lustful, and sometimes loving – in other words he presents it as it really is. So many films (gay and straight) present an idealized view of sex and relationships, everyone is so beautiful and the sex so clean, so sanitized. Not Bruce La Bruce, here sex is messy, dirty, filled with lots of body-types from skinheads to larger build men, from people with piercings to rent boys.

Hustler White is funny, sexy, over the top, at times shocking, at times moving, but above all, great entertainment.

In the Folds of the Flesh
R0 NTSC DVD
Severin Films

Severin—the Criterion of Smut have done it again, this time with a superb edition of the rare In the Folds of the Flesh.

In the Folds of the Flesh was made at the cusp of the Sixties and Seventies and mixes together psychedelic sensibilities with a Seventies Giallo crime thriller. It opens with a murder, indeed a decapitation, but it is difficult to work out exactly what is happening and this ambiguity is the foundation of the film. There are scenes of what looks like an attempted rape, a violent struggle and then a climatic killing. The wife buries the body in question in the yard of the palatial property. However, she is not alone, her act has been witnessed by an escaped convict just before being captured by the police and "sent down".

We then cut to quote from Sigmund Freud "... And then a sudden violent shock that left a deep impression on the mind and damaged it permanently...what has been remains imbedded in the brain, nestled in the folds of the flesh, distorted. It conditions and subconsciously impels..." and a swirling mass of coloured paints filling the scene psychedelic style. It seems that since witnessing the brutal killing the children have been psychologically scarred.

The boy is a strange and bizarre artist who seems only sexually attracted to his sister and the girl has become some sort of praying mantis who seduces men on a regular basis only to then brutally kill them before the consummation of their lovemaking. It seems the only sexual relationship she can enjoy is with her brother and even then she needs to be intoxicated. They regular celebrate their perverse union with strange "hippy" like music and art performances.

The bodies of her dead lovers are quickly disposed of by the brother and mother in acid and buried in the garden, with some prize pieces fed to the two vultures they keep as pets.

As one guest arrives after another the murders pile up but they seem immune from prosecution, until now. After thirteen year behind bars the convict who witnessed their first murder arrives with attempted blackmail in mind. He not only wants money but spends time dominating and degrading the family. He wants a good time and wants it at the families expense.

However, good old mum has a solution. After a number of superbly politically incorrect "Nazi flashback scenes", she uses the cyanide pills she has had on hand since the war and blackmailer is quickly gassed in the bathroom !

In the Folds of the Flesh is not especially violent, it is more the sheer bizarreness of the whole film which makes it truly memorable, there are decapitations, incest, Nazi flashbacks, a mother son killing team, dissolving of bodies in an acid bath and that's just the half of it.

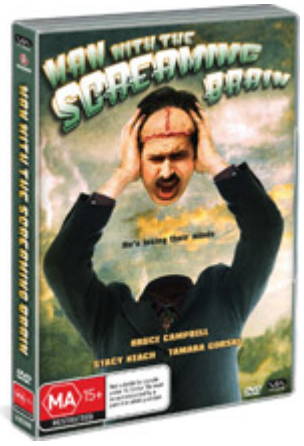
The plot is intriguing and the final climax of the tale is impressive, things are certainly not as they seem and the ambiguity of the murder at the start of the film is finally resolved in a fitting fashion.

The acting is impressive and the woman in the film stunning, this is a strange sort of exploitation film, mixing a crime thriller of Seventies Giallo heritage with the sort of Freudian sexual and psychological motifs found in late Sixties films. It is certainly a rarity and a great find on DVD.

The Severin edition of this rare film is a revelation, superbly clear and developed from original vault materials. There is only very minor damage. The sound is clear and without problem.

Web: http://www.severin-films.com/

Man with the Screaming Brain
R4 DVD
Viavision 2008
Distributed by: Madman Entertainment



Man with the Screaming Brain is cult cinema meets 1950's science fiction homage and offers an amusing romp through robots, brain transplants and at times somewhat clichéd humour. Starring America's cult favourite Bruce Campbell as well as Stacy Keach and Ted Raimi, it is well acted, nicely directed (by Campbell himself) and certainly achieves its aim – to be a modern adaptation of those old B grade drive-in classics with ridiculous titles and silly pseudo scientific themes.

Sleazy and arrogant Tom Selleck look alike American pharmaceutical tycoon William Cole (played superbly by Campbell himself) arrives in Bulgaria with his obnoxious wife Jackie (Antoinette Byron) to explore some potential business investments. Eastern Europe is certainly not as he would expect it as he finds no safety belts in their taxis and horror of horror, they even smoke and talk on their mobiles as they drive ! He clashes with everyone he meets espousing the value of capitalism and the failure of Bulgaria as a socialist state.

As they head towards a business appointment, gypsies attempt to hijack the taxi, however, their driver, Yegor, is actually a former KGB agent and makes short work of their attempt. Cole takes another look at Yegor and realizes he may be of value in this lawless state and hires him as his personal driver for the day. Jackie is certainly impressed with the arrangement as she is bored and finds Yegor's masculine, if not mindless, enthusiasm rather appealing and cannot wait to wile the day away in the back of his cab !

Cole hopes to rebuild his sagging relationship and asks Yegor to find him a special gift for his wife. Yegor presents Cole with a stunning ring, life does Cole know that this ring was once Yegor's engagement ring to his gypsy girlfriend Tatoya (Tamara Gorski). Of course, all these discordant notes are brought together when Tatoya hustles down Cole and steals his wallet, cash and ring. When she realizes that Yegor

has sold the ring he was to give to her before dumping her so brutally she decides it is time for revenge. She despatches Cole with a metal bar to the head and stabs and then shots Yegor. It seems that is how things are done in Bulgaria, beware of jilted lovers !

At the same time we come to understand that Dr.Ivanov (Stacy Keach) and his strange assistance Pavel (Ted Raimi) have been working on a drug to stop the rejection of tissue so that organs can be easily transplanted. It seems the way Ivanov finds bodies for his experiments is to monitor the police radio station and where he hears about Cole, he sees this as his one chance for fame. He rebuilds Coles damaged brain using sections of Yegors brain tissue with obvious results. Cole is now a combination of himself and Yegor and this results in an onslaught of slapstick. While the success of the humour varies from the hilarious to the downright embarrassing, there is enough of it to keep the film entertaining and to spin a fun sci-fi tale. Of course, the story continues with Jackie having a one on one catfight with Tatoya, losing and then being rebuilt into Pavels hop-hoping toy robot's body since that was the only body they had left on hand !

Man with the Screaming Brain is an uneven but ultimately amusing film which combines a rather convoluted plot which is an obvious homage to Fifties science fiction cinema with a cult film sensibility. It is packed with silly and ludicrous scenes, slapstick, lots of biffo, a catfight or two and some truly bizarre moments. The whole sub plot of transplanting Jackie's brain into a hip hopping robot beggars belief.

There have been many critical reviews of this film, however, I think at times reviewers believe every film has to be a work of art and forget to accept movies for what they are. Man with the Screaming Brain has been clearly made as a fun piece of cult cinema entertainment and to that end succeeds admirably.

Mil Mascaras Resurrection
Osmium Entertainment
US Release

Lucha Libre professional wrestling became a major cultural phenomena in the Forties and Fifties, so much so that a new genre of films developed, the Luchador.

These films began in 1952 and continued right through to the Seventies. One of the very better figures involved in this genre is Mil Mascaras (The Man of a Thousand Masks), born in 1942 – he entered the ring in 1965 and a combination of his aerial wrestling style and flamboyant personality made him a worldwide celebrity. Indeed in 1975, he was voted "The Most Popular Wrestler of the Year" by US magazine.

His first starring role in cinema was in the self-titled film Mil Mascaras which gave Mascaras a comic book style origin story, this was followed in 1970 by the Mummies of Guanajuato, where Mascaras played alongside Blue Demon and El Santo, it became the highest grossing Mexican Luchador film of all time. He has starred in some seventeen films and after some years of semi retirement, this is his return to the big screen.

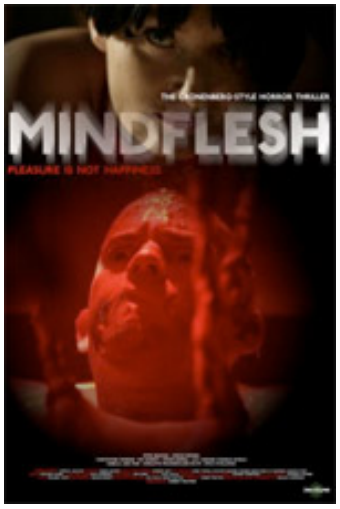
While other countries have their superheroes and cultural icons, Mexico has its wrestlers and the uniqueness of its Luchador films was the way in which it drew all manner of culture forms into the mix including horror and science fiction. These strange films were the equivalent of the better known US superhero films, however, here the hero was a wrestler and the enemy was more likely to be an Aztec god or even a mummy or vampire. Mil Mascaras Resurrection is a bringing together of the Luchador film with the Mexican horror tradition and the result is quite spectacular.

The story line is suitably fantastic. The film opens as a nefarious cult is undertaking secret rites to bring about the resurrection of an Aztec Mummy. This Mummy has designs on world conquest and has a powerful jewel which allows him to control the mind of any who cross his path. At the same time Mil Mascaras is investigating a spate of blood bank robberies and slowly begins to connect the two together, as it seems the blood is needed to resurrect the Mummy's Aztec army from the dead. Mil Mascaras has a long history with this Mummy, it seems his whole family line was condemned to eternally wear the mask as it stood against the plans of conquest of this evil Aztec warlord. What's worse is that the daughter of a friend and the potential love of his life has the Mummy's tattoo on her lower back and is destined to become the Mummy's bride.

Along the way, we encounter resurrected Aztec warriors, demon wrestlers, vampire women, a 1950's like robot and enough wrestling outfits to fill a warehouse. The sheer campiness of the outfits would make Liberace blush ! The film is packed with biffo, not a gun in sight and lots of wrestling. Even the climax involves the Mummy and Mil Mascaras wrestling it out to save mankind ! But you need to take Mil seriously, indeed he flies to America (in his own superhero plane, no less) and is met with awe by the President (Richard Lynch), who allows him to address the military chiefs and on his word alone they are convinced that the world is in danger from a resurrected Aztec Mummy !

This is ridiculously fun entertainment and a superb homage to Mexican Luchadore films. Mil Mascaras Resurrection is packed with all manner of strange outfits, bad special effects and B grade acting. Sure, the Mummy and the Aztec dead army look cheesy and the dialogue is so over the top you will not be able to believe your ears but I promise it will be an unforgettable experience.

Mindflesh
Zen Films
R0 DVD



Mindflesh is a truly astounding indie film; it is hypnotic, surreal and cruel, beautiful, seductive and terrifying.

At times it reminds me of Stuart Gordon's From Beyond, at other's Clive Barker's Hellraiser, but it most seems to resonate with David Cronenberg with a special reference to Videodrome.

It has beautiful cinematography and relatively simply visual cues such as a watery wave across the screen or an "eye effect" when coupled with the dark ambient soundtrack create an unrivalled uneasy feel.

The acting is solid and the special effects top notch, in my mind the effects rival those found in far higher budget films. The creature is especially impressive. The characters are believable and the plot unusual but it an interesting and offers an unusual intriguing dark fantasy story. The soundtrack should also be noted as it is especially atmospheric and creates an eerie mood throughout.

The film is based off the novel "White Light" by William Scheinman and evokes all manner of esoteric and spiritual motifs as well as the edges of quantum science.

The story is of a taxi driver named Chris, he has had a very difficult time of late, splitting with his girlfriend and in a job he doesn't especially like; it seems he is a budding author. He has a lot of demons from his childhood which haunt his dreams. However, recently, things have gone from bad to worse, the beautiful woman of his dreams has become to appear as a ghostly apparition at all manner of strange locations.

He has become obsessed with her appearances and begins to document them. As she appears more regularly her materializations seem accompanied with both an erotic and destructive charge, he experiences terrifying overpowering nightmares and develops strange nodules on his stomach.

As the story unfolds the more philosophical underpinnings of Mindflesh become better explained and these are impressive. It seems to mix Buddhism, Quantum physics and pop psychology into a heady and erotic mix based on the idea of "consensus reality". It is explained when Chris meets the author of a book on manifestation.

It seems some humans are the edge of evolution and have the ability to harness reality. Since Chris is untrained in how to use this "supernature", his childhood trauma has created an erotic yet demonic entity directly from his traumatized psyche.

At the same time this is not just a danger to Chris as this ability to "materialize" desires is contagious and is spreading to his friends. To stop this contagion "The Guardians", creatures which watch over the planet will use any method needed to force Chris to face his childhood trauma and kill his manifestation.

The climax of the film where the "Guardians" force Chris to confront his past is truly overpowering both in the savagery of the "Guardians" methods and the tragedy of Chris' tormented past.

This is a film packed with sex, violence, trauma, nightmares and visions. The use of nudity, strong erotically charged scenes and explorations of sex and violence help explore the central motif of the film

which is the way in which powerful emotions (sexual and otherwise) can open the door to the "supernature" and mould reality.

While this may seem an eccentric notion to many, it is actually a well held philosophical belief in many Buddhist, fringe science and alternative spiritual belief systems.

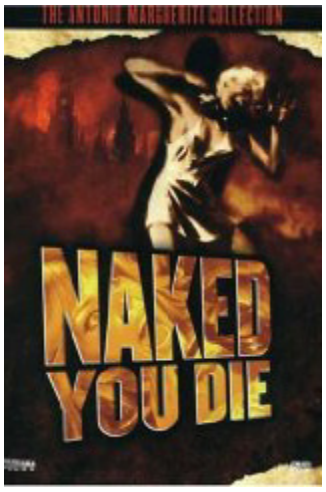
Whether it is taken literally or allegorically, the power of childhood trauma to change reality (or our perception of reality) underpins this tale.

It is truly innovative and original and will confront and confound and have you thinking about it for a long time after you have finished watching it.

It is not surprising it has received rave reviews and was the winner of the Best Horror award at the Philadelphia Independent Film Festival. I think this will be the first award of many !

Web: http://www.zenfilms.com

Naked You Die
Dark Sky
R1 DVD



Naked You Die is a stylish Giallo tale which is high on style and mood while low on the gore and violence. This is an unusual directorial choice since most Giallo films are marked by fairly intense violence, that being said, the look and feel of the film makes it very successful. It is further enhanced by a groovy Sixties soundtrack and a cracking climax.

It is fair to say that the style of the movie is a little strange. It was original developed by Mario Bava and Tudor Gates but after a heated clash with the producer, Bava withdrew and was replaced by Antonio Margheriti. Accordingly, when originally released Bava would not even allow his name on it. However, as many years have passed, it is now listed as being by both directors. When first hitting the screen in the US it was butchered and marketed as the Schoolgirl Killer (sometimes even as the Mini Skirt Murders).

The film opens as an unseen murderer creeps in on a young woman having a bath; he turns up the music and strangles her. She is dragged across the floor and stuffed in a large suitcase and taken to the Hilda School for girls. All this occurs to a very hip Sixties soundtrack and then the opening credits rolls.

As one expect the girls are given a lot of attention by the camera as they spent their days in swimming customs and in skimpy clothing (it is holiday time). There are all sorts of strange activities go on, including one of the girls having an affair with Richard Barrett (Mark Damon) in which all manner of bizarre dialogue is used as a form of love play ranging from the King Richard tale to the tale of the Big Bad Wolf.

There is also the rather pervvy La Floret (Luciano Pigozzi) who likes to watch the girls from the shower and the strange swimming instructor who wears his diving gear exercising at night to work up a sweat and lose weight !

As one of the girls go missing, the headmistress tries to keep it all under wraps as the school has an international reputation. However, when one of the girls is found strangled in the shower the police are called and an investigation begins. The body count mounts and the strange characters are all possible suspects. One of the joys of this film are the various possible killers, the twists and turns of the plot and, of course, the climatic ending - you will not guess who the killer is !

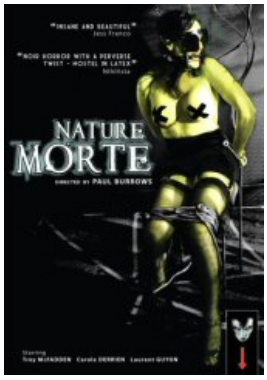
As a Giallo film this is a fairly low key film, it certainly lacks the violence found in most films within the genre, but the careful creation of suspense through some superb cinematography make this a very enjoyable thriller.

This edition from Dark Sky is uncut

and while showing some minor damage here and there, for a forty year old film, it looks superb.

The colours are very bright and clear and the image is solid, the soundtrack is marvellous and the voices are clear. There are easy to read subtitles in yellow.

Nature Morte
Salvation Films
R0 PAL



Nature Morte is a surprising, innovative and impressive Giallo gothic film exploring the boundaries of sex, violence and death. While it clearly has been made on a limited budget it is really quite impressive how much Paul Burrows has been able to squeeze out of digital video, a fascinating plot and a dark vision to create quite a stunning and unique work.

The film opens powerfully with a leisurely visit to the studio of John Stephenson. There is a superb ambiance to the scene (and indeed to the whole film) created through a mixture of creative cinematography and a moody and evocative soundtrack. Stephenson's studio is slowly explored by the camera and we see he has company, a young beautiful lady. He seems to be planning a simple seduction, but as the scene evolves we realize he has a much darker agenda.

For Stephenson pain, torture and death are an integral aspect of his artistic expression. He needs to torture his subjects, so he can capture their suffering on canvas. His is a highly celebrated figure in the art world and thrives on his double life as an artist and serial killer. Abruptly after his tenth work he kills himself.

Oliver Davenport is a writer and art historian; he is celebrated in his field and has produced various books on John Stephenson. While exploring the Stephenson case, he is asked by Georges Albert of the French Police to become part of their investigation.

It seems a new set of paintings have been appearing on the market from an artist in Thailand and they seem to be identical to the Stephenson works.

Davenport with Georges in tow travels to Thailand to meet the artist who has created these new works. He finds Lec, a strange and eccentric painter and erotic explorer and through Lec enters a strange world of drugs sex, torture, lust and death. The depiction of Davenport's descent into all manner of drug induced sexual excess is superbly evocative yet at the same time quite restrained.

Through Nature Morte there is a careful balance between what is shown and what is inferred, it could have easier slipped into being a simple "sex and gore" flick but by using careful editing, inference and suggestion, it offers a mood of sexually charged violence without becoming "torture porn".

It has a very "European" mood and hence exudes a sophisticated approach to its subject in comparison to the flood of sex and horror films presently on the market.

So what is the connection with Lec and Stephenson ? Is he the real killer or a brilliant forger. The intriguing thing about the plot of Nature Morte is soon as you think you have a handle of where it is coming from, it takes you another step deeper into the mystery. Without giving away too much, the secret of the small painting which leads from Stephenson to Lec and ultimately to Davenport and beyond is central to the tale. It also allows an exploration of the dark side of anyone who comes to possess it.

I have read some press which has argued the plot is too convoluted; I think that this observation ignores the influence that Italian Giallo has had on Nature Morte. In many ways it is a film which brings together the psycho-sexual themes found in Jess Franco and French eroticism with the unusual crime tales which were ever so popular in Italian cinema especially with filmmakers such as Bava, Argento and Fulci.

Nature Morte is a dangerous film, it is edgy, violent, erotic and transgressive. It has some truly memorable scenes of quite nightmarish quality. The power of Nature Morte is the way it mixes eroticism and violence in such a way that you are both attracted and repulsed, the line between victim and perpetuator is blurred and the relationship between sex and death is provocatively explored. In Nature Morte all relationships "are power relationships" and sex, death, love and pain are intertwined in a highly original and stimulating manner.

As a relatively low budget film I found Nature Morte quite astonishing. The soundtrack by Arban and Steven Severin (of Siouxsie and the Banshees) is inspired and with filming in England, France and Thailand, the film has a truly international feel which further extends the exploration of its contraband subject matter. Each of the locations offers something different and combined with the various plot changes make Nature Morte quite an accomplished thriller as well as an unusual exploration of eroticism and violence.

The Salvation DVD includes some nice extras such as deleted scenes with Director's comments , a blooper reel, a stills gallery and various Redemption oriented items. The deleted scenes are an especially nice touch. It features director Paul Burrows armed with a glass of wine discussing all manner of subjects related to the film with over half an hour of clips. There is also an alternative opening that Burrows reveals ends up featured later on as a movie playing on a TV in the film called "Murder in Milan".

Salvation Films
Web: http://www.salvation-films.com

Of Darkness
Eventide Productions
R1 DVD

Of Darkness is a powerfully concentrated horror short, it is twenty minutes of carefully executed suspense and terror. The plot is simple and yet through the creative use of lighting, sound and excellent cinematography a mood of "edge of your seat" suspense is created. The shock of the bloodshed at the end is the icing on the cake.

It is rather surprising what can be achieved on a

low budget using a carefully designed film which focuses on the use of light and darkness, innovative use of camera angles and some solid acting from a team of fairly youthful actors.

While the plot has a certain "Lovecraftian" feel and the book is clearly based on the Necronomicon, it is not a spoof or comedy and works to seriously explore the "mythos" in a modern setting.

Brian and Jeff have the unenviable task of cleaning out their deceased grandfathers belongings, as they pack away a truck of his more obscure possessions; they stumble on an ancient book. It seems their mother believed her grandfather was some sort of "Satan worshipper", but of course they do not take that sort of talk seriously.

With their mother away, Brian sneaks out to a party and Jeff holds a sleepover, bored with the movies on TV, he pulls out the book to scare the group, especially the youngest member Charlie who they regularly terrorize.

In an attempt to prove he is not afraid Charlie opens the book, what they find horrifies them all, it is filled with images of sadism, torture and death. However, worse is yet to come, because Charlie has unwittingly let loose a malevolent entity which will not stop until they are all dead. This entity is hard to fight as it has no form, it exists in the darkness and since darkness is all round them, they cannot escape.

Special Features include "The Other Side of Darkness" behind-the-scenes featurette, storyboard Comparisons, filmmaker's Commentary, trailers and a photo gallery.

Of Darkness has been well received at film festivals worldwide, indeed of the twenty one in which it has been shown, it has been nominated ten times for Best Short Film and won more than half of these, bringing home six best film awards. It also received awards for most "Most Promising Filmmaker", "Best Cinematography", and "Audience Award for Best Short Film"

Web: http://eventideproductions.net

Parasite Quarantine
TR Productions
Finland

Parasite Quarantine is the second full length feature release from TR Productions in Finland, prior to this they have released about 30 short films.

It is essentially a gore filled zombie film set in a military facility which has been locked down after some sort of parasite outbreak. To control the outbreak a knock out gas has been used to immobilize the soldiers left on the premises (and the creature) and the doors sealed for a set period. As the privates awaken, disoriented and unsure what has occurred they slowly realize that they are up against a formidable enemy – a flesh eating, parasite ridden zombie which is infecting others at an alarming rate.

While this is a low budget independent film, the film certainly packs a punch. It is well produced and certainly shows some creativity- shadows, darkened rooms, narrow corridors and limited lighting is used to create a very effective mood throughout the film. The soundtrack is a very strong point and combined with the innovative cinematography certainly sustains the film throughout.

The acting is reasonable, certainly for a low budget film, it isn't flawless but it does the job and when you are dealing with a gore filled splatter, it really isn't the prime consideration.

Parasite Quarantine is a nostalgic journey for me; it reminds me of the gore filled zombie splatters I so loved during my long lost young in the Eighties which made the explosion of underground video so attractive.

Parasite Quarantine isn't perfect, far from it, but as low budget film, it shows immense promise. The quality of the filming is good and it sustains the mood and suspense enough to make it successful. What really sells the film is the special effects, with what are clearly limited resources they have created some very effective and powerful gore – the zombies look great and the various killings ranging from bullets to the had to fingers being bitten off and heads pulled are horrifying effective. (My only question is why do intestines always look like sausages !)

All in all, Parasite Quarantine is rather fun and horrific gore ridden Zombie film which has quite a bit going for it.

TR Productions
http://trproductions.net/parasitequarantine/

TR is also releasing a 3D, old-school horror action-adventure for the PC. A demo of the game can be downloaded from the website.

There is a trailer for the film at:

www.youtube.com/watchv=YGhPMzfT4BQ

Pathology
R4 DVD
Roadshow

Pathology is the new shockfest from the creators of Crank and it certainly lives up to the hype surrounding its release.

This is a film packed with sex, S & M, drug use, autopsies and gore, so be warned it isn't for the squeamish or prudish.

The plot is an interesting exploration of human nature and how we create our own ethical boundaries, it examines the simple question – if we could kill without any chance of being caught would we do so ?

The film focuses around Ted - he is highly educated with a degree from Harvard, has a beautiful girlfriend from a well to do family and have just landed residency at the well regarded Metropolitan University pathology program.

He has returned from working in Africa but seems to lack life experience. When he enters the program is exposed to a new, exciting and very dangerous world.

At first it all seems like fun, lots of booze, some drugs and sexual exploration, but things get weird when he finds out about “the game”. The major pathologists at Metropolitan University, it seems, are too intelligent for their own good and in a battle of wills they each kill someone and then have to try and deduce the cause of death.

As first Ted resists the game, then his ego gets the best of him, the choice of his victim helps, a vicious killer who slaughtered his family and botched his own suicide attempt. The game is justified by all manner of excuses about the nature of the people they kill, but soon begins to degenerate into killing for its own same.

As the game continues Ted is seduced into helping Juliette with her killing but soon realized she conned him into assisting her. He also beings a torrid affair with her, even though the group tends to view sexuality as a “share” experience. Things get out of control as Jake, the head of the “killing club”, becomes more and more deranged and slaughters three hookers with a meat cleaver.

After Ted returns home for a break, Gwen offers to return with him, a fatal mistake. The game continues and it seems that Jake will not let him escape. There is enough evidence to convict him and yet can they go on playing forever ?

Ted engineers a solution but is costly, very costly, including in ways he does not expect.

Pathology is an interesting film with an unusual premise. It is beautifully filmed and using the setting of a pathology lab certainly ups the gore factor as well as creating a mood of medical paranoia. Nobody likes a hospital and pathologists being cavalier with body parts only makes us all the more nervous and edgy and this, of course, helps create the atmosphere of the film.

There are lots of bodies, autopsies and organs thrown willy nilly so don’t watch just after eating. The only negative in Pathology is the characters, none of them are really likeable, I would perhaps go further and say they are all pretty revolting. In my mind Ted is the worst of the lot, Jake may be a insane serial killer but Ted just seems to go along for no particular reason except for some peer pressure !

The “Hollywood” S & M and lesbianism is fun with the sex being relatively transgressive, however it does have the feel of being a little contrived.

Michael Weston as Jake is especially convincing and the acting is generally top notch. Overall, there is certainly enough twists and turns to keep you interested until the climatic end.

Extras:

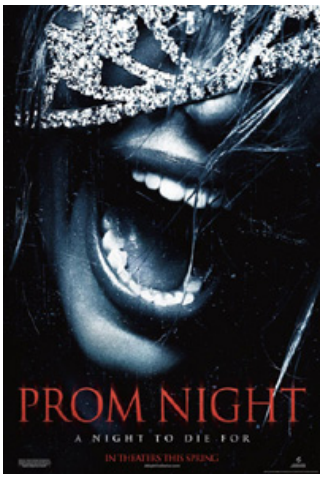
A commentary by Director Marc Scholermann and writers/producers Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor.

Creating the Perfect Murder featurette

The Cause of Death: A Conversation with Pathologist Craig Harvey.

Trailer

Prom Night
R4 DVD
Sony 2008



Prom Night was a 1980 slasher which was rather successful for the time, while it was somewhat derivative of other slasher horror films of the period; it had its moments and is still quite a favourite among cult film aficionados. The 2008 Prom Night is really only similar in name only and its setting within the slasher genre.

The plot for Prom Night is fairly predictable "cut and run" fair, though does offer some occasional twists. Richard Fenton, a young biology teacher develops an obsession with a Donna, one of his female students. When his love is not reciprocated and he is warned off in no uncertain terms, he becomes unhinged and slaughters her family. She survives, though psychologically scarred and spends some years in therapy. He is sent down for a long time, however, pleading insanity ends in an institution.

Some years later and a few days before her school prom he escapes, for some reason the institution does not notify the police until sometime later. By now he has made his way to the prom and once again the slaughter begins. Anyone who gets in his way is given the short shift with a sharp blade, he wants Donna and this time is not taking prisoners.

Prom Night may be predictable, however, it is saved from total disaster by good quality cinematography, suspenseful mood music, superb sets (the Hotel looks awesome) and the deliberate use of misdirection to create tension. Sure,

we are all used to deliberate fake leads, tension that leads nowhere and then an unexpected shock, but it does work in Prom Night. The acting varies greatly. Johnathon Schaech as Fenton, the madly obsessed teacher is extremely impressive and as discussed in the extra on the nature of obsessional killers, spend a lot of time reading about erotomania and it shows in his performance. However, the various teen characters are pretty bland and the lead character Brittany Snow as Donna is no Jamie Lee Curtis and is insipid and fairly two dimensional. When you start thinking that the only interesting character in the film is the killer you should start to worry. It is very hard to be concerned about characters getting killed when they have so little depth that you do not develop any emotional contact with them.

Prom Night looks good and certainly works; it did well at the box office and has many fans. Sadly, however, it did not take risks and hence succeeded by being a "safe slasher". The violence and horror is fairly tame (it is M rated in Australia) and while the tension and suspense makes it worth a watch on a slow night, it is not a high point of cinema. Even though the uncut edition is promoted as having extra footage not seen in the cinema etc, it is not a radical improvement and no great achievement.

I am not saying Prom Night it not an enjoyable slasher romp, I just feel that this genre has been (no pun intended) done to death and if you are going to do such a film in the modern film market you need to show some real innovation and creativity and not just churn out a "made to formula" film with pretty teens and a killer with a blade.

It is currently on sale cheaply at many online DVD stores at a bargain price so is worth getting cheaply for a slow night.

Restraint
Madman Entertainment 2008
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This dark new Australian film is a bit of a surprise. If you are used to Australian films being action first, class last, as in the recent review of "Not Quite Hollywood", this will show you another side of the genre.

Ron is a killer on the run with two deaths to his credit already. Dale is an ex-prostitute who has teamed up with Ron to get away from her seedy life. They need to find somewhere to hide until the police hunt dies down.

They find an isolated country mansion inhabited only by Andrew, who is young, rich and agoraphobic (he can't stand going outside the house). Andrew is the ideal hostage, scared, submissive and housebound, so they soon form a sort of trust with each other.

Ron sadistically teases Andrew about his psychological condition and his sexuality, and it is obvious that Andrew will be killed when they leave. Andrew buys time by suggesting a way they can draw money from his bank account, by having Dale dress up as his upper-class fiancé and cashing cheques on his account.

He teaches her to speak correctly and present herself better, and much to her surprise it works. Dale starts to like the new person she can become. Ron, however, remains a sadistic homicidal maniac and Dale cannot help but contrast the well brought up Andrew with the increasingly erratic Ron.

Andrew is gradually taking some control over the situation, in his attempt to stay alive, and the line between captive and captors is becoming increasingly blurred. Andrew also has a dark secret in his past, which he tells Ron in an attempt to show that he can be trusted.

After Dale withdraws a second lot of money, she is forced to choose between Ron and Andrew. Ron now intends to kill Andrew anyway. Can Andrew escape, not only from Ron but from the prison of his mental condition as well? What will happen with Dale?

The film is good, tight suspense all the way, with twists and turns to stop the plot becoming straightforward. It is not a nice movie – it has a full quota of violence and sex, but then neither are the characters very nice.

David Denneen's direction keeps the plot moving rapidly, avoiding a major defect of this type of movie – too many directors slow down and revel in the tension, which then starts to become boring. The production standard is excellent, and the actors very believable. Teresa Palmer, a veteran of four feature films, is superb as Dale. Travis Fimmel was apparently a face and body of Calvin Klein underwear, but his good looks do not stop him playing the part of Ron with a suitably demented touch, with evil just below the surface. Stephen Moyer shows great ability as he moves Andrew from the weak, disturbed loner to the more confident would-be survivor fighting for his life.

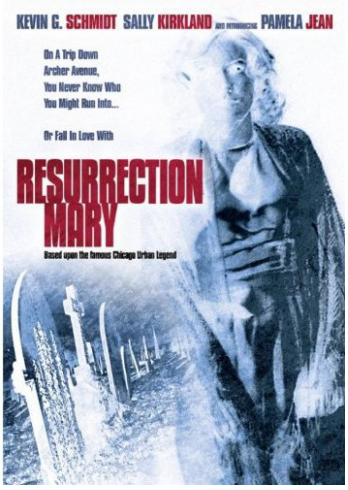
If the psychological suspense-thriller is your style, give this a try.

Don't be put off by the lack of a track record in Australia for this type of film. It's as good as, if not better than, anything of this style that I have seen in a long while.

Extra Features

Behind the scenes featurette
Interviews with the cast and crew
Alternate ending
Trailer

Resurrection Mary
R1 DVD
Starz/Anchor Bay
2008



One of the quintessential urban legends or ghost stories (depending on your attitude) is that of the phantom traveller or hitchhiker. The tale is usually based at a location where there has been many car accidents and usually involves an isolated stretch of road. At certain times of the year a lonely figure, sometimes dishevelled and disoriented, usually distressed, is found wandering. In many cases they seem a little "out of time" with out of date clothing, speech and quaint ways.

A helpful driver picks up the stranger only to find that they either vanish when they look away a short time later or when dropped off at a certain location they look back and they have disappeared. Chicago seems to have more than its fair share of such sightings and there are records of these occurrences going back to its earliest days.

The most celebrated case if that of Resurrection Mary and it is considered one of the best documented ghost stories of modern times. The story seems begins in the 1930's, the exact nature of the event that caused the haunting is still unknown. Around that time drivers along Archer Avenue started reporting strange encounters with a young woman in a white dress. The focus of the case seem to be between the graveyard and the O Henry Ballroom later renamed as the Willowbrook. One of the most compelling reports was the 1939 report by Jerry Palus which

involved him dancing with Mary for many hours. There are a number of theories about Mary's origins including that of Mary Miskowski, who was killed crossing the street one night in October 1930 on her way to a costume party, however, many believe it is the ghost of Mary Bregovy. Neither of these identifications seem to fit the haunting and most historians of the legend still see this as a unsolved case.

Resurrection Mary is a creative exploration of the Resurrection Mary story bringing together various aspects of the historical haunting with general legends about phantom travellers and hitchhikers. It is peppered with newspaper clippings and scenes fading to comic book style format which help locate the film within the world of haunting, legends, urban legends and "believe it or not" style comic books.

The story centres on Jeff, a young man who has had his share of trouble since his parents died in a horrible accident on Archer Street. His true love is Karen, but she dumped him some years ago and she is now going out with Kevin, an arrogant, heavy drinking party boy. Jeff is unable to find a girl for the dance and has pretty well decided not to go.

This time of the year is difficult for him since it is the memorial of his parent's death and he decides to go for a quiet drive and when driving down Archer Street nearly hits a beautiful girl dressed in a stunning white dress. Her name is Mary. He drops her off near the cemetery as she says she wishes to walk the rest of the way home and doesn't think much else about it. The next night, however, when he goes for a drive, she is there again, he invites her to a local dance and she arrives as if out of nowhere. The night goes well and Jeff is very pleased with himself, however, a fight erupts between him and a drunk Kevin and things get very ugly. That night Kevin is found brutally murdered.

Mary is indeed mysterious and turns up unexpectedly and seems to be unwilling to answer questions about her origins. However as the bodies pile up, including four friends and policemen, Jeff needs to find some answers quick before he is next on the list or charged with the murders.

As a film Resurrection Mary is fascinating viewing, the plot has been created to offer a very credible version of the legend and is interesting and intriguing. The acting is very good, some characters are more believable than others, however, I found the major characters such as Jeff, his Grandmother and friends fairly convincing, even if the police were a bit stereotypical. (But Heh, so many of them are !!)

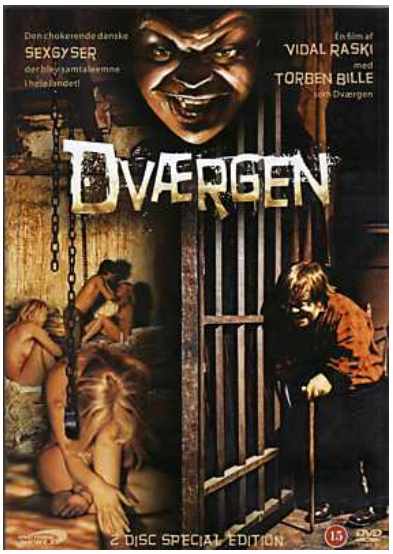
Pamela Jean as Mary should not be overlooked, she plays the role exceptionally well and expresses both a subtle eroticism mixed with an ethereal quality which makes it easy to believe she is of supernatural origin.

The comic book presentation throughout the film is innovative and gives the film a real “Ripley’s Believe it or not” feel and since this is where many of ghost stories received so much exposure it works well. There is also a nice “cameo” use of a section of the Unsolved Mysteries episode on Resurrection Mary.

The special effects at the ending are a little “eccentric” but in many ways add another layer to the film; Resurrection Mary exists in a realm between historical ghost story, urban legend and comic book ghost tales and this film very effectively brings them together to create a very enjoyable and successful experience.

Resurrection Mary Website
http://www.resurrectionmarythemovie.com/

Sinful Dwarf
AWE
R2 DVD



Sinful Dwarf is considered one of the rarest cult exploitation films. It is very unusual to find copies and most are seriously edited releases.

Another World Entertainment has made available one of the most impressive editions of this film with a two disc set. It includes the standard cut export edition (which for most people is controversial enough) and the fully uncut Danish release.

This second edition was original shown in Danish cinemas and while having burnt in Danish subtitles (which have been carefully obscured) is the only surviving uncut edition being taken from a 35mm print.

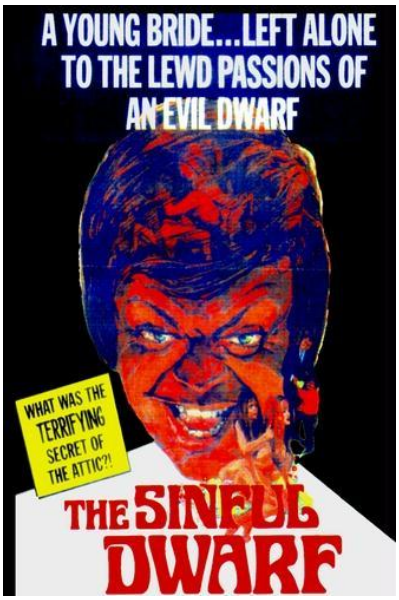
Don’t let the fact that it was shown in cinemas make you think this is tame, it includes nudity throughout, explicit sex and enough exploitation to make the timid among us run from the room in disgust !

The film opens as a young woman wanders innocently along the street without a worry in the world; she is approached by a Dwarf named Olaf (Torben Bille) who is leading a little toy dog by the leash. The young girl seems fascinating by Olaf and his dog and follows him home.

They reach where Olaf lives, an old boarding house, and he offers to show her his large collection of toys, just as she begins to enjoy looking at the collection, he knocks her out with his cane.

Peter (Tony Eades) is an unemployed writer, Peter and his wife Mary (Anne Sparrow) are having a hard time making ends meet. They decide to take a room in the boarding-house run by Olaf and his mother Lila Lash. Lila Lash (Clara Keller) lives in the past when she was a cabaret singer and spends the day steeped in gin.

It seems Lila and her son Olaf have found a new way of covering their costs when the boarders slowed down. They kidnap young woman and keep them in the attic addicted to heroin from where they service customers, in other word's they run a lively sex trade.



Olaf certainly enjoys his job and is a violent character and this is what makes the film so "politically incorrect", he is the quintessential evil Dwarf/Troll of fairy tales and Torben Bille plays the role with frightening gusto. Clara Keller is also impressive as Lila Lash, when she is drunk enough she reminisces with songs from the old days which are so bad you want to scream, in one memorable scene, she whips one of the girls as she is dressed as Marlene Dietrich singing a Dietrich classic. (If singing is the word, she must have worked very hard to howl so horribly off tune !)

The cinematography makes this a perversely well made exploitation film, the way in which the songs Lila Lash (what a great name !) sings are cut to the abuse of the girls is very disconcerting.

For example, in one scene she is singing the song Choo Choo Bamba with Olaf on the piano and this is intercut with scenes of a client having his "Choo Choo Bamba" with a girl upstairs. Tasteless but it certainly works.

The whole of the film is well edited, nicely shot and surprisingly professional for such exploitative fare. The X rated sections do look a bit like they were only added for the shock value, but hell ! That's what exploitation cinema is all about.

On top of the lively sex trade we have a heroin smuggling ring using teddy bears which is coordinated by "Santa Claus" who runs a toy shop. The obsession with toys and bears in many ways are exemplified in Olaf who is a man-child, who on one level plays like a kid, yet

gives very brutal discipline to the girls when required and indeed, seems to relish it.

This constant juxtaposition between toys, dolls and teddy bears and the sex trade and heroin trafficking give the whole film a very perverse feel.

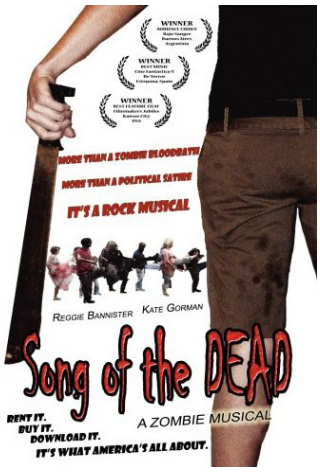
While this is clearly an older film (1973) the film is fairly clear with only sporadic flickers and only a small amount of damage, the sound is clear. The unrated edition is certainly explicit with a surprisingly amount of nudity and occasional bouts of sex.

Sinful Dwarf is certainly one of the classics of depraved cinema. The AWE release is sometimes difficult to find, a place which tends to keep them in stock is the US Cult cinema store Diabolik DVD at:

http://www.diabolikdvd.com

AWE: Web: http://www.anotherworldent.com

Song of the Dead
Show Me Pictures
R1 DVD



Song of the Dead is a zombie musical-comedy-horror film and comes complete with buckets of gore, dancing zombies and a rock opera score.

At the same time it has a strong politically satirical message and the director Chip Gubera has even offered a portion to the films profits to anti war politicians such as Ron Paul.

The film opens as Sandy King (Kate Gorman) with her emotionally unstable boyfriend Brad (Travis Hierholzer) place flowers on Sandy's mother's grave, who sadly died when travelling to Brad's coming home party after he has institutionalized for some time.

Suddenly, they are attacked by a zombie which Brad has to kill with a spade. Escaping with their lives (but with Brad bitten after a further zombie encounter), they travel to Sandy's families cabin.

All across America, the dead are returning from their graves and attacking the living. The President (Reggie Bannister from the Phantasm films) advises that the dead are returning to life due to a pathogen of some sort and that while it was spread by the US military trying to eradicate the 100 year mosquito virus, it must have been "infected" by terrorists, naming an unheard individual as the one to blame.

He christens the virus the Jihad Resurrection Virus (JRV) and sees the zombies as a new wave of terrorism albeit in a novel form.

Sandy and Brad arrive at the Cabin and team up with Sandy's military brother and their Vietnam War veteran father Harold King (Conrad Gubera). Together they form the frontline to protect each other against the deadly zombie invasion.

As they fight against the zombie menace Sandy is saved by Arthur Bundy (Steve Andsager). However, Arthur is not as "clean" as he seems, he admits his hobby is killing and he has buried twenty of his victims in the local graveyard. However, in these dark days, perhaps a professional killer is what they need to survive. (His name should have been a giveaway!)

Song of the Dead is a fun amalgam of gore, comedy, satire and song and dance numbers. On the plus side it is highly entertaining and offers a nice twist on the zombie genre.

On the down side the acting tends to be a bit amateur and the music and dancing varies greatly in quality, some are rather fun (the zombie song is great), while others are less so.

Reggie Bannister as a cult favourite is rather amusing as the President, for example, but he clearly can't hold a note even if his life depended on it. I also hate to say it but someone should teach those zombies how to dance, I mean, really....

Song of the Dead is an amusing romp and is funny, satirical and perhaps a little ridiculous. But it is worth a watch.

Song of the Dead Website
Web: http://www.songofthedead.com

Speed Dating
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD
Produced, Written, Directed by Tony Herbert

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

I confess to a liking for Irish films, starting with the low-key comedy "Waking Ned Devine" and covering the whole range up to the dramatic, convoluted "Dead Bodies".

I like their somewhat understated sense of humour, more like British humour than American, and their willingness to let quality acting carry the movie rather than special effects. That said, it was a while before I realized that Speed Dating was actually Irish, set in Dublin. Tony Herbert has made a conscious effort to denationalize the movie, and it's only the accents of some of the characters that give its origins away.

Herbert has been writing scripts and directing shows for some time, but this is his first feature film. System 48 is his and cameraman John Conroy's production company. Apart from the brief (26 minute) "Poker Night" this is System 48's first production.

It has "independent" and "low budget" characteristics, but there is a quality in the movie that overcomes these limits.

James van der Bexton (well played by Hugh O'Conor) is approaching 30. He had a traumatic breakup with his girlfriend two years ago, and he is now rather desperately trying Speed Dating in an attempt to find another girl he can relate to. Unfortunately the emotional baggage from the split-up makes this hard for him.

Speed dating is a system where a group of people get together to meet as many people as possible in a limited time. The men (or women) sit down at individual tables, then the other sex circulates around each one in turn at three-minute intervals ("Twenty dates in a hour guaranteed").

In three minutes they must decide whether they like each other enough to try a second meeting or start a relationship. It's a harsh way to meet women, and James is making a complete mess of it.

He is developing a bad reputation among the organisers of the speed dating clubs.

His friends are no help. Dan (Paul Moran) is convinced that if he can get James laid, all will be well. Leo (Paschal Friel) is obsessed with solving crossword puzzles in record time, and is less concerned with James' problem.

Neither is his psychiatrist (David Hayman) who knows what James' problem is but is unable to get the message through to James.

"I'm a child of the 1960s. For me the 60s didn't end until the 80s. Somewhere in between I wrote a book. I smoked, swallowed or snorted half of South America.".

Nor is his family …

"My father is out of the 1920s, my mother is a raging alcoholic, and my sister is from some planet as yet undiscovered"

An accident puts James in hospital where he meets nurse Susan King (sympathetically played by Australian actress Emma Choy). James is suffering from mild memory loss, and without the memories of his ex-girlfriend haunting him he becomes quite normal and is attracted to Susan. Things turn ugly when he is involved in a murder, and then his ex-girlfriend returns and wants to restart their relationship.

Tony Herbert's carefully crafted script allows the bit players as well as the main characters a chance to show their talents. Even a gay bartender gets a short but funny two-liner. The good cop – bad cop duo (Don Wycherley and Luke Griffin) are brilliant.

The plot could so easily have degenerated into just another mildly funny love story, but the quality acting and polished script lift it to something better. It won't be everyone's style, but I loved it.

The film has won a number of awards in various independent film festivals.

All it needs is wider distribution so other viewers can appreciate Herbert's excellent work.

Stage Fright
Michele Soavi
Blue Underground
R0 NTSC DVD

Stage Fright also known as Aquarius and in Europe as Deliria is a rare Eighties slasher from Michele Soavi.

The film opens with a stylized rape attack sequence, we see a feather drop and a killer with a owl mask, the scene seems somehow artificial- and it is, soon we realize it is a musical and the troupe is working on getting it right before opening night. The troupe is made up of struggling actors whose recompense is a percentage of the take and the director is using every possible hook to make the musical work, including a strange turn whereby the killer actually gets raped and killed by his victim! He is packing in as much “eroticism” as he can and is not above manipulating and degrading his troupe to get the results he wants.

As the last changes are being made to the musical, the lead actress Alicia sprains her ankle, she sneaks out to the hospital next door for treatment, never mind it is a psychiatric institution. In any event her ankle is treated but not before mass murderer Irving Wallace has escaped hiding in the back of her car. When they arrive he brutally slaughters her friend, leaving her body in the rain.

The police arrive but can find no trace of the killer, convinced he has escaped, they leave to return in the morning but leave a car parked outside just in case.

The director, Peter, desperate to make a buck from the musical in any way he can, demands the team continue working and remodels the story on Wallace. He asks one of the actresses to hide the key to the theatre so nobody leaves during the late night rehearsals.

Now things get nasty, Wallace is hiding in the theatre and begins to kill them off one by one dressed in the owl mask which features in the musical. He kills the actress who knows where the key is and the police outside cannot hear them, this is a cat (or owl) and mouse game to the death.

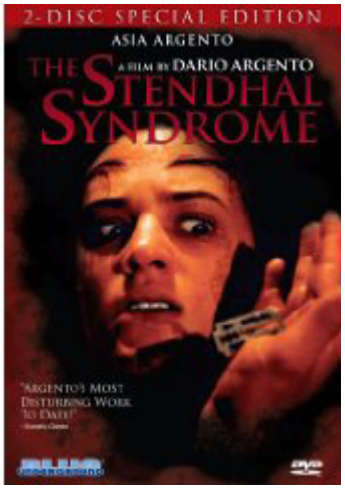
Wallace now kills with abandon and there is certainly lots of blood, gore and killings, axes, knives, drills, chainsaws – all get put to good use. There is also the requisite false ending and the final climax.

Stage Fright certainly offers a lot of suspense, looks great and has quite a powerful Eighties soundtrack ranging from electronic music to classic and rock.

Yes, it is a typical Eighties Slasher but it does have a little more style than a lot of copycat slashers that were made during the period. Soavi learn his craft from Dario Argento and Mario Brava's son, Lamberto Bava and hence is able to imbue Stage Fright with a mood and look which elevates it about the average.

The Blue Underground edition is very clear and the widescreen transfer (1.85:1) is anamorphically enhanced for 16x9 TVs. The soundtrack is powerful and really “drives” the film, the DD5.1 Surround Ex track is nothing short of astounding and Blue Underground have really done quite a superb job with a very rare film.

The Stendhal Syndrome
R1 DVD
Blue Underground
2 Disc Special Ed



The Stendhal Syndrome was a classic return to Giallo by Dario Argento, made in 1996 it was generally only seen in edited forms. While in recent times Argento has been more celebrated for his horror, in my mind The Stendhal Syndrome is quite a startling work which is very much underappreciated and this 2 disc uncut, high definition edition is an impressive release.

The film opens in a superbly bewildering manner. We see an attractive woman nervously racing to get into a museum and then becoming overwhelmed by the art, experiencing confusion and disorientation leading to hallucinations. She then collapses as she feels she is drawn into one of the paintings and is experiencing what it describes. She is helped to her feet by the museum staff but has lost her handbag, when it is returned by a very attractive blond gentlemen, it is missing her I.D. She returns to her hotel room (which he only remembers by the key in her purse) and is suffering from temporary amnesia. She is able discover her name but little else. We later learn she suffers from Stendhal Syndrome, a psychological condition that causes confusion, disorientation, dizziness and even hallucinations in certain people when they gaze at works of art, especially larger collections.

As she regains her memory, we find she is Anna Mannie (Asia Argento), a police detective from Florence, Italy who is on the trail of a rapist. He is brutal and cunning and has killed his last two victims; it seems she went to the Uffiz Gallery after receiving a tipoff that the killer would be in the gallery. She does not realize that the killer made the call (disguising his voice) and is stalking her, indeed the stranger who assisted her to the taxi was the killer himself.

Alfredo (Thomas Kretschmann), then breaks into her room, attacks and brutally rapes her and forces her to watch him raping and killing another woman in front of her. She escapes but is placed under psychological care and placed on stress leave in her family's village. However, once again, she is stalked. This time Alfredo kills the two policemen guarding her and takes her to an isolated location where he rapes and beats her in the most brutal fashion. When he leaves her to return to the city to undertake another killing she experiences the Stendhal Syndrome again this time with the junkies paintings on the walls, in fury she breaks free and waits for Alfredo. When he returns she smashes the springs from the bed into his neck, pokes out his eye and shoots him in the chest and to be sure he is dead rolls him bleeding into the river ! Since the river flows into many systems, his body is not immediately discovered.

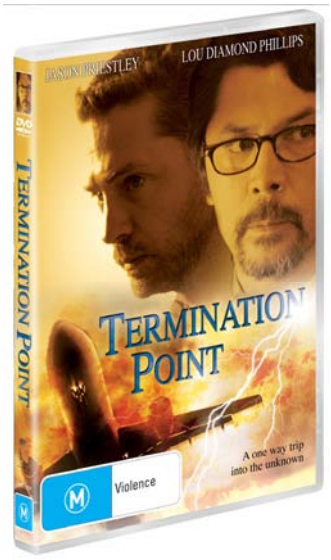
She returns to her therapy and meets a young French Art professor with whom she begins an affair. But strange phone calls begin to occur once again and she seems to be taking on a new personality. Is Alfredo still alive or is something more terrible at play ?

The Stendhal Syndrome is a fascinating journey into the effects of rape and the nature of the mind . The Syndrome itself is a real one and gives the film a sense of authenticity, the use of the syndrome as a way to explore the emotional effect of visual images and sound creates a environment which is both lush and beautiful and at the same time frightening and bewildering. Argento has used colour and sound to incredible effect to create a visual background to what is essentially a psychological study of the effects of rape. The violence is brutally depicted and while the climax is perhaps predictable it is nevertheless successful.

The best release is the two disc set from Blue Underground, the film itself is uncut and of the highest quality with the high definition transfer being supervised by the cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno. Since both the music and sound effects are so significant in this film it is great to note the care that has been taken with the presentation. The English tracks are offered in both Dolby Digital 5.1 EX, 2.0 stereo, and a 6.1 DTS and the Italian (with very clear optional) subtitles in Dolby Digital 5.1 and 2.0

Disc 2 includes all sorts of extras. It opens with a 20-minute interview with Dario Argento. The second interview is with psychoanalyst and author Graziella Magherini, who named the Stendhal Syndrome and from whose book Argento gained inspiration for the film. There are also interviews with effects creator Sergio Stivaletti, assistant director Luigi Cozzi, and production designer Massimo Antonello Geleng.

Termination Point
R4 DVD
Icon Film Distribution
DVD Rental December 10th 2008



Termination Point is a solid sci-fi action film which has an intriguing plot somewhat reminiscent of "The Philadelphia Experiment" though a little marred by low budget special effects. Science Fiction has always explored the nature of time and some of the more interesting plots have used this theme to their advantage. Termination Point uses the idea of time travel and latest advances to science to create a suspense filled tale of government conspiracy.

Caleb Smith (Jason Priestly) works for a top-secret government organization called SDC, his role is to protect the development of the latest scientific and military technology. He is on leave, taking his wife and teenage daughter on a trip to Mexico. Unbeknown to Smith, also on board is Dr.Daniel Winter (Lou Diamond Phillips), who has stolen a teleportation device he has been working on to keep it safe from military exploitation. Winter is temperamental and more than a little paranoid and yet some of his fears may have a ring of truth to them.

Smith receives an emergency call and must leave his family onboard to investigate the threat, he promises to meet them lately.

After investigating Winter he realizes he is on the same plane as his family but sadly it is way too late to stop the plane taking off with the device onboard. The SDC takes a heavy handed approach and tries to force the plane to turn back and then, on presidential orders, decides to blow it up mid air. Winter feels cornered and uses his device to try and save the passengers.

The device moves the plane to Null Space, a dimension beyond ours, but is only able to save a small number of passengers, including two crooks who are after the device. As the device is largely untested it has an unexpected side effects, it opens a vortex between our world and Null Space which begins to tear the fabric of the world apart, it begins to grow larger and larger by the hour, swallowing towns and cities as it expands.

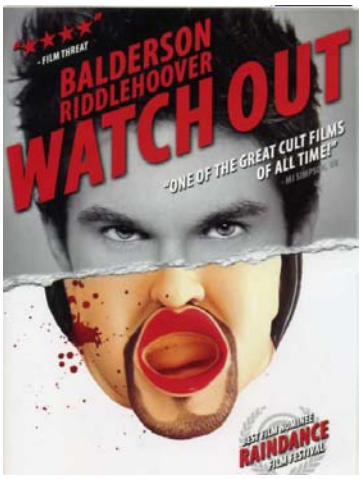
As Smith searches for a second controller so he can regain control of the device and save his family (and the earth), he has to deal with a team of assassins hot on his heels which are working for a traitor in the SDC who plans to sell the device to the highest bidder.

This is a an interesting and action packed Sci-Fi tale, it has all the ingredients of a damn good yarn including time travel, other dimensions, spies and conspiracies and government secret operations. The acting is reasonable, Priestly isn't too bad as Smith, though nothing to write home about, but Phillip's as Dr.Daniel Winter offers a credible performance.

The major problem is the special effects which range from passable to problematic. The vortex looks great as does the jet, however, the opening scene when the plane crashes and many of the scenes where buildings are being blasted apart leave a lot to be desired.

Still, Termination Point is enjoyable. I like Science Fiction and there isn't enough of it on the market today. While Termination Points has its problems, it is still good entertainment and has more than enough to offer to make it definitely worth seeing.

Watch Out
Dikenga Films
R1 DVD



Over the years all manner of sexuality has been explored on screen, heterosexual, homosexual, fetishes of all sorts, from the most harmless to the most extreme - but I do not think I have ever seen a film explore sexual narcissism.

Watch Out is based on the novel by Dr. Joseph Suglia and is the story of Jonathan Barrows who is not only a narcissist but can only enjoy sex with himself ! The film is divided into two acts and presented somewhat like a 1920's movie. Throughout the film the words Watch Out are flashed on the screen like the dialogue in a silent movie.

As the film opens we see poor Jonathan being harassed by his parents who feel they must find him a date. They try to match him with a rather dull girl who lives next door and ask her drunken father a range of extremely embarrassing questions, he then demands to know if his daughter has had any boys "put their thing in her", belts her with an umbrella and hints that he has drilled a hole in her head!

This opening scene makes it clear Watch Out will be a very strange experience. Jonathan is forced to go on regular dates with her as they wander aimlessly through the cemetery he simply feels more and more alienated. When the girl next door fails to give his parents what they expect they hire a prostitute and sit with popcorn and a camera to celebrate their son's first sexual experience, which of course fails, but not before one of the more awkward scenes in cinema for quite some time !

As the story progresses we come to understand that John only loves himself, it seems at first glance he is neither gay nor straight and is a true misanthrope, finding humanity repulsive and beneath him. He makes love to himself using photographs, movies and a blow up doll with his own face attached. Watch Out is at times explicit and certainly in the first act amusing. The film is sustained by an impressively biting and satirical voice over which is at times insightful, at other times just plain vicious and nasty. As Barrow travels to Benton for an interview for a job at a community college, he reflects on his fate with dissertations of how he sees the world and the people around him. The strange thing is that while he is unbearably arrogant, narcissist and vicious, there are so many times you agree with what he says. He may be a arrogant bastard, but he seems to be an honest and rather perceptive bastard !

As he reaches Benton and signs into the local motel, he comes face to face with the mediocrity of the suburbs and this is portrayed in all its horror, from the local bar to the closeted gay desk clerk at the low grade motel at which he stays. The more he has to deal with the stupidities and inanities of the people around him, the more infuriated he becomes. At first things are just a nuisance but as the secretary at the college does not seem to be even able to arrange the interview he has travelled all the way to Benton for, he reaches breaking point. This first act of the movie is a superb mixture of sexual humour, dark and bizarre characters which certainly have a "John Waters" feel and cynical misanthropic commentary.

There are so many truly amazing scenes which make this film stand out that I cannot list them all. The scene with Barrow and the female student in the cafe when he describes why he

cannot love a woman is so misogynist it is screamingly funny. Then there is the priest and his reaction to the woman in the confessional and his suicide by vacuum cleaner, still the most memorable scene must be Barrows love scene with his own picture stuck on a blow up doll - truly astounding.

As Barrows begins to lose control he decides to wait and confront the professor who has ignored his interview. He hides the closet and waits for Dr Mendoza and listens to his lecture. What he hears does not impress him, Mendoz degrades the significance of the individual, praises the community and argues that the only value a man or woman can have is through marriage and children and thereby through it participating in the larger community. It is such a revolting and conservative presentation that I think it would even send me over the edge !!

At this stage things get very weird, but what exactly occurs is not quite clear, all the figures that he has slighted in the community seem to take revenge on him in a scene of anal rape. Whether this actually occurs in reality or is in mind, we are unsure, it does seem more like a hallucination caused by a lifetime of being hounded and abused for being different and this sets off a chain of events which lead to act two.
Act two, however, moves the story to a very different level. Now John wants revenge and the film movies the black humour of act one into that of a dark horror film. Here we see John taking revenge on all those who have wronged him in a series of surprisingly grisly vignettes. These "set pieces" ranging from killing his professor and stuffing his severed penis down his throat to sewing together his babysitter and her boyfriend ! The final killing is his ultimate attack on mediocrity, as he kidnaps a highly celebrated pop singer. She pleads for her life offering to do anything (including golden showers and drinking her own piss) and while the voice over explains his contempt for the bankruptcy of a culture which makes a heroes of average people who little significance (such as pop singers), he cuts off her toes. We hear police cars in the background as he walks to the bathroom and discusses what he will do to complete his killing spree before they arrive.

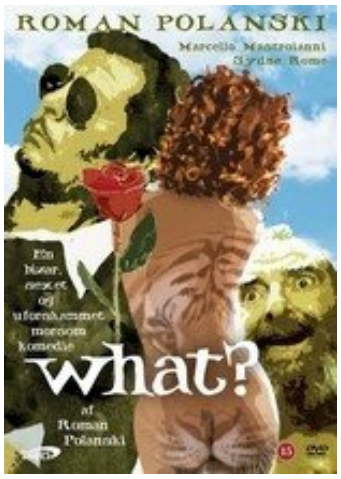
Watch Out is a unique and powerful work of cinema. In my mind it is one of the most unusual and challenging files I have seen in 2008. The acting is really quite superb, Matt Riddlehoover as Jonathan Barrows is not only physical stunning (and you see quite a bit of him!) but totally inhabits the character. The supporting characters presented throughout the film are superbly perverse, bizarre and above all, convincing. The film looks and sound great and while the use of a voice over is not always popular today, it worked perfectly in Watch Out, it gave us insight into Barrow's inner world and gave the film a psychological authenticity which added validity to the films premise.

What does Watch Out mean ? I leave that to you. There are all sorts of possible interpretations. While Barrow does seem to be primarily an outsider and Misanthrope, he does seem to have more contempt for woman than for men and you wonder whether him hiding "in the closet" at the end of act one before his final rampage has significance. At the same time there is lots of psychological literature about narcissism, asexuality and people who prefer the company of themselves, so perhaps this is simply the first cinematic exploration of this unrepresented form of sexuality. His rage and fury in the second act certainly seems to be representative of the torment he has experienced throughout his life from his parents onwards and in many ways is a motif found in much of outsider literature, ranging from the geek as outsider to the experience of sexual minorities.

Whatever we take from Watch Out this is compelling, shocking, entertaining, humorous and at times even horrifying. It is quite a journey and an absolute much watch !!

Web: http://www.dikenga.com

What?
Roman Polanski
Severin Films UK
R2 DVD



"A Sexually Explicit Re-Imagining Of Alice In Wonderland From The Warped Mind Of Roman Polanski!"
Mr Skin

Severin has become very known in the American market for releasing unusual and controversial cult films, this is their film UK release and it is certainly a rare gem. What ? is a surreal film made by Roman Polanski, who is considered by many to be one of the most significant but also controversial filmmakers of the last century.

His career includes some 48 awards including Oscars and Golden Globes and his output ranges from horror to psychological thrillers, comedy to more mainstream fair. What? Is considered one of his most unusual and bizarre films, while Polanski has always had a dry if not cynical sense of wit, What ? is imbued with a strange black humour that starts at the very opening scene and continues right to the end.

Polanski described What ? as "the ribald adventures of an innocent girl", while critics called it "an amoral, depraved disaster". However, some thirty years later we can see the film in it historical context and it is superb example of films that were made at the cusp of Sixties and Seventies. It has the surreal and psychedelic style of the Sixties and the nudity and sexuality of the early Seventies.

The film opens with Nancy, a beautiful yet naive young woman in a car with three Italians, she doesn't speak their language and talks away discussing how it is nice to meet people who are friendly and she can trust. They laugh as they have something nasty in store for her, while rape is not usually humorous Polanski turns it into a hoot. As they try to have their way with her, one of them has his glasses smashed, and as he is near blind without them, sees what he perceives to be her plump backside and shoves his member in – one problem, it is his mates naked arse !

In the resulting mayhem, Nancy flees her attackers via an elevator-birdcage that takes her to the luscious Villa Noblart, but only after escaping a large dog trying to hump her ! Strangely she is welcomed as one of the family and given a room for the night. Slowly she comes to meet the strange and eccentric characters that inhabit this world.

Each of the characters seem to have very quirky habits. The pimp (played by Marcello Mastroianni) loves to dress up, in one scene he dresses as a tiger who wishes to be whipped, in another as a policemen who canes poor Nancy for perceived transgressions. He also had a hatred for the sound of ping pong and squishes any ping pong balls that come into his yard from his neighbours (to their obvious irritation).

Then there is the sex addict next door, the harpooning Mosquito, the middle aged American couple who seem to think Walkie-Talkies are the most celebrated form of technology and, of course, the mad as a hatter patriarch whose final wish is for Nancy to display her naked body to him. There are also various other peripheral characters such as strange semi dressed woman who walk in and out and the house assistant who regularly complains about his arthritis and who is discovered by Nancy between her legs one morning !

Her journey through these characters "Alice in Wonderland" style involves her steadily losing various pieces of clothing, her possessions and the

room she inhabits at the Villa. All she saves is her diary in which she records everything that happens to her in a superbly detached if not third person manner. In the end she is left naked and escapes down the lift and leaves in a truck full of pigs !

What this all means is anyone's guess, it is surreal, funny and full of wit as well as all manner of visual jokes. Nancy notices that many of the events she experiences are occurring time and time again and wonders if she is experiencing Deja Vu or whether this is all a dream, as the film ends, we may wonder the same.

What ? is a strange film in that it was produced between Polanski's rather violent version of Macbeth and Chinatown and represents a very unusual euro-cult offering. It was not well received in America at the time but this could have been due to its dreadful re-editing for the US market, this edition for Severin for is the complete edition in pristine condition.

The cinematography is beautiful and the clarity of the film is astounding, which is important considering the amount of flesh on show ! The soundtrack is clear and this is very important since the repartee throughout the film is fast and you need to hear every word.

I loved What ? I think it is a refreshingly witty comedy which has a lot to offer. It is surreal, quirky and filled with eccentric characters. I think it will bring a smile to your face and is a superb antidote to the formulaic comedies released by Hollywood these days.

Special Features include:

Sydne In Wonderland: a featurette with star Sydne Rome. This is a 16 minute interview with the films beautiful star in which she discusses working on the film with such notables as Polanski and Mastroianni.

Memories of A Young Pianist: a featurette with composer Claudio Gizzi which discusses his background as a film composer and his work on What ?

A Surreal Pop Movie: a featurette with cinematographer Marcello Gatti which is very informative, especially considering the beauty of the films locations and sets.

There is also a trailer.

While She Was Out
R4 DVD
All Interactive

"While She Was Out" is a suspense driven thriller with superb cinematography, intense and visceral explosions of violence and offers more than first meets the eye.

The first section of the film is an uncomfortable exploration of a woman unhappy with her lot in life. She has two adorable children but an abusive and violent husband and is unable to deal with the demands of the life he requires of her. Basinger plays the role of Della superbly and brings an edge of bitterness mixed with sadness which is quite believable.

The slow long film shots of the streets around the "gated community" in which she lives and the deliberately bright colours used on the Christmas decorations and lights offer a juxtaposition to the mess the house is in which to highlight the emotional struggle going on inside of her.

After another potentially violent argument Della heads off to the mall to pick up some wrapping paper to prepare the presents for her children. It is during these first scenes that subtle events occur that make the viewer wonder if all is as it seems. She buys a Tea and even when she tells the woman her name is spelt with two ll's, she writes her name on the cup with one. The charger is missing from her phone and her credit card has been cancelled.

Do these events mean anything or are they simply these to enhance the mood of edginess

we feel. The way in which Della is filmed emphasizes her loneliness and alienation, she wanders in the Christmas crowd at the local Mall and yet seems isolated from it, she meets an old friend and yet seems somehow out of whack with the rich crowd which her lifestyle demands she associates. Her friend seems superficial (to put it mildly) but Della follows the artificial pleasantries as required but seems uncomfortable with them and they only reinforce the disdain with which she views her life.

She has trouble finding a parking spot and so parks in a more isolated location. Furious that a car is taking up two spots, she leaves a rude note on the owner's car. When she returns the owners of the car pull in behind her and a confrontation unfolds.

A gang of unruly thugs egg each other on as they abuse and degrade her. The language and behavior of the group is graphic and deliberately presented in a way to make the viewer feel extremely uncomfortable. When a parking officer intervenes they shoot him in the head and this is the beginning of what is essentially a hunt.

The shooting of the officer is impressively presented and comes as quite a shock, it moves the whole film up a notch and it the beginning of the violence "set pieces" which occur throughout the film. Rather than using constant violence and even gore, "While She Was Out" uses sporadic explosions of violence which have far more effect. Coupled with the relentless tension created by the cat and mouse game between the gang and Della this proves extremely suspenseful.

Della escapes in her car but crashes into a building site in an "edge of your seat" scene where a metal pipe only just misses her head. She hides in the building site and when confronted by the group, smacks their leader (Lukas Haas) in the shoulder with a metal spanner (breaking his collar bone) and again escapes.

However in the melee one of the group is trampled and dies and so the gang, fuelled with revenge, hunt her through the surrounding forest.

Only armed with a tool box she is pursued by the gang of thugs but turns her bitterness and anger against them one by one. The story hinges on the motif of a woman pushed too far. The men in her life have proved too violent, life has run her over once too often and she "aren't gonna take it no more".

It is impressive what a woman can do with the tools she has on hand - this resourcefulness re-enforces the motif of a woman pushed too far and what she can do when put in a corner. She also stops and reflects on a picture drawn by her children that she has carried with her and knows she must survive for their sake.

The hunt is visceral and suspenseful and the confrontations brutal, the climax is powerful as she turns the gang's leader emotional manipulation and sexuality against him and escapes to return home. Now empowered, she takes one final step to freedom.

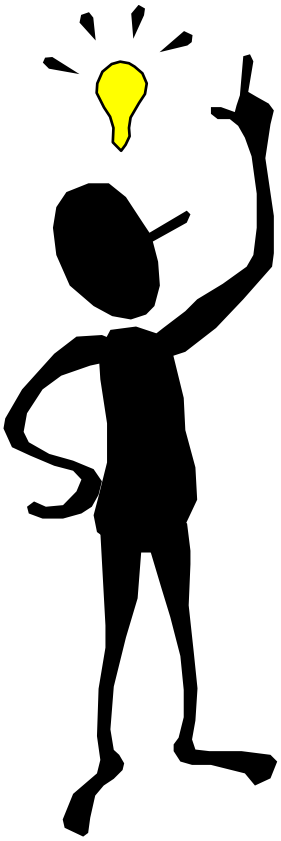
"While She was Out" is striking film. It is beautifully filmed and creates a sense of dread and suspense before anything out of the ordinary has even occurred.

Kim Basinger is impressive as Bella and the performances all round are convincing. The interactions between the gang members and male macho and bravado are all too real.

On one level this could be seen simply as a "revenge film" but I think that misses the many textures within the filmmaking which adds a further dimension to the story and makes it really worth seeing.

Web: http://www.allinteractive.com.au

THINKING TIME !



Andrus
The Man, the Mind and the Magic
Skeptical Media
R1 DVD

Jerry Andrus was a unique talent and a great mind, renowned for his erudition, understanding of the human psyche and for his ability to fashion illusions and magic that could fool even the most seasoned illusionist. Andrus was considered "the magician's magician" as he devised his own illusions and "sleights of hand", rather than using the "tools of trade" that were common among magicians. Throughout his life he developed his own unique style that confounded and entertained so many. For example, which most magicians use misdirection during card tricks, Andrus developed his own totally personal approach which invited the audience to watch as close as possible and yet still be deceived.

Jerry Andrus, however, was not just as magician. He was celebrated as a thinker, a philosopher, agnostic and humanist. One of his specialities was the exploration of optical illusions and he created a range of exceptional demonstrations to show how easily the mind could be deceived. These impressed the editor of Omni magazine so much that he was featured on its cover and celebrated in the media.

The intelligent and insightful documentary explores the man, mind and the magic of Jerry Andrus. We come to appreciate him as an outstanding and compassionate individual who thought "outside" the box and refused to allow convention to stifle his inventiveness. We also come to appreciate his total dedication to honesty (to the point of near obsession), because, in his words, "truth is so hard to come by". While he followed the path of reason and loved to debate and argue, he was also deeply compassionate and a great communicator.

In the Mind we come to see his eccentricity and creativity firsthand including a visit to his home, which he called "The Castle of Chaos" where all manner of inventions were in a sort of disorganized organization, we also see just some of the incredible optical illusions he shared wherever he travelled. In the Magic we see some of the skills he developed including some of the most startling sleight of hand tricks.

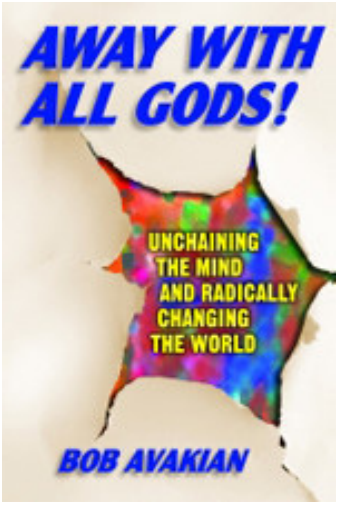
Along the way we come to understand his philosophical view of the world and the importance he placed on his magic as a means to show us just how easily we could be deceived and hence the prime significance of having a rational and thinking approach to life.

There are also interviews throughout the documentary with such sceptical luminaries as Michael Sherman of Skeptic Magazine and James Randi, among others.

This is an excellent documentary which offers an insight into the life, mind and work of a truly unique individual as well as encouraging us to think deeper about our own understanding of the world around us.

Web: http://www.skepticalmedia.com

Away with All Gods !
Bob Avakian
Insight Press



Away with All Gods is a powerful and erudite critique of religion and superstition and a rousing call to place our trust in reason and the scientific method. While it is clear that Avakian comes from a Marxist background we should not hold that against him. It is too easy to reject a book because of a authors political leanings, one way or another, rather than actually engaging with its content and allowing its arguments to rise or fall on their own merit. Avakian intelligently argues his case with reason and passion and while at times using some of the vocabulary of his background, at no time did I feel did he sacrifice his reason for ideology.

In my mind as I followed his presentation I found his work extremely insightful and perceptive. I especially liked the way Avakian did not just offer a critique of religion but offered a positive view of rationalism and the scientific method, making it clear that not only is religion irrational and superstitious but is dangerous in that it creates political suppression and stymies progress. Unusual for an atheist work and in marked difference to works of Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins Avakian went further to explore the way in which religion is used to sustain the status quo and as a reactionary force by political power mongers. I especially found the exploration of religion and imperialism persuasive.

Avakian begins the book with a stinging critique of the Bible, Christianity, then moves onto Judaism and Islam. This critique takes up about half the book and is extremely comprehensive, it is quite clear here that Avakian has studied these religions extensively and is able to offer an informed analysis of their beliefs and practises. Not much is left standing after he is finished.

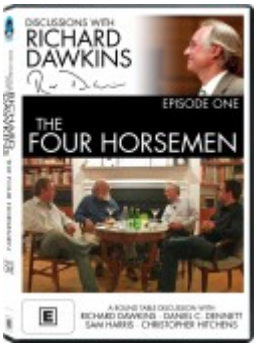
The next section offers a formidable exploration of the relationship between religion and all forms of political suppression from slavery to patriarchy, the denial of equal rights to gays to racism.

His exploration of patriarchal values in the Bible is especially informative as is the connection he makes between the suppression of human rights by religion. This is especially significant since so many people like to claim that the "Abrahamic" religion gave the West human rights and dignity for the individual when in reality it is quite clear these rights were only for a limited minority i.e. the white male heterosexual religious adherent.

The final section of the book is quite outstanding as it takes a different tack. Avakian has cut a swath through superstition and religion, but that is not enough, he wants to show what can be used to replace it. Atheism is not nihilism and Avakian offers us an excellent exposition on the value of reason, the scientific method and the ability to have a sense of awe about life itself without the need for spirituality. Avakian stands against the irrationalism and shows us how dangerous it really is, from terrorists and extremists to the subtle effect religion has on human rights and progress. He stands against not only religion and superstition but for reason and science and shows us what an alternative way of living can really be like. More importantly he shows us the revolutionary potential of finally doing away with all gods and what such a new world could look like.

Web: http://www.insight-press.com

Discussions with Richard Dawkins
The Four Horsemen
Episode One
Siren Visual
R4 DVD



The Four Horsemen Episode One is a two hour unmoderated discussion with four well respected authors and atheists. It offers a far reaching discussion on all aspects of atheism, religious, science, education and, of course, the current political and social crises caused by terrorism and extremism. One of the first misconceptions about atheism which is immediately dispelled by this documentary is that all atheists think alike and are part of some sort of anti-religious conspiracy.

Each of the members of this discussion are highly individual and each clearly has their own interpretations of atheism and their own view of

the world. Richard Dawkins is the quintessential scientist, arguing from a solidly "evidence based" worldview and is passionately concerned about the danger of belief in a supernatural creator and in irrational thinking. His primary goal is in dispelling the "God myth".

Daniel Dennett also comes from a scientific background but clearly is used to working within a "scientific academic" environment and at times seems lost in hypothetical problems and obscure issues, his focus seems to be on larger issues relating to evolution, science and atheism.

Christopher Hitchens, seems to me anyway, to be the most eccentric of the lot, clearly coming from an arts and humanities background and from within journalism.

He has written a host of books covering all aspects of atheism as well as books on cultural and philosophical concerns.

Sam Harris, the youngest among them, while clearly an atheist, seems concerned that by focusing on the ideological battle of atheism itself we do not handle peripheral issues of great significance such as Jihadism in Islam and abortion or stem cell research. He hence has a wider focus that the other three with a strong "social concerns" emphasis, while an atheist he seems to "market" his product with a more user friendly feel !

So while they all agree in rejecting supernaturalism and irrationalism, each has a different take on how this applies in the modern world.

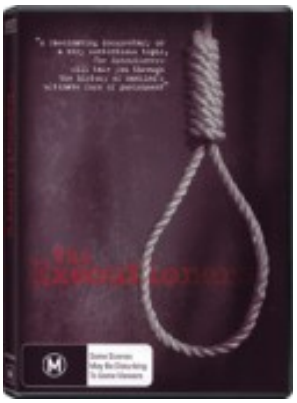
This diversity of personalities and opinions make this a fascinating discussion, it is divided into two one hour sections and is worth watching over a couple of nights so you can digest each episode and perhaps debate some of the issues with your family and friends.

There is a lot of ground covered in this discussion, the first hour tends to focus on the general issues relating to atheism, ethics, religion and science, while the second focuses more on issues relating to the concept of the numinous, ethics, terrorism and related issues.

All in all, this is a fascinating discussion and offers lots of food for thought.

Web: http://www.sirenvisual.com.au

The Executioners
Siren Visual
R4 DVD



The Executioners is a well produced, professional and intelligent look at the history of execution, the various methods used, the issues surroundings its use and the effect it has had on those who have been involved in undertaking the task on behalf of the state. It avoids sensationalism and takes a serious and insightful approach to its subject. The series is divided into three approximately one hour long episodes focusing on the use of capital punishment in England, France and the United States.

The first episode explores the development of hanging within England from the use of strangulation (the short rope) and public executions to the use of the "long rope" to create an instantaneous death. One of the most fascinating aspects of this first episode is on the technology of hanging from the importance of the knot and the type of rope to the way in which the "drop" is calculated. It also examines the lives of various hangman and the effect, in most cases tragic, it had on their lives.

The second episode explores the development of execution in France and how it began in a way very different from that of England. Originally the lower classes were subject to all manner of torture and killing while the upper classes were killed by the more noble method of decapitation by sword. This was undertaken by a special class of executioner who lived outside the town and was financed by the Kings largesse. However, after the French revolution there was a desire for a more "democratic" method of execution and since death by sword required a certain "cooperation" from the prisoner, the guillotine (known as "The Widow" in France) was developed. In the case of France the executioners kept to themselves and literally formed a special family dynasty which undertook the task and this is explored in some depth.

In the final episode The Executioners looks at the complex situation of capital punishment in the United States. Since the fifty states each had their own systems of law and custom, most

developed their own approach to capital punishment. For example, in Utah, since it was a Mormon state, that the Old Testament ideal "of spilling blood for blood" was required and hence capital punishment must be via firing squad.

Hanging was certainly the earliest method right from the frontier days through to the shameful episode at the Nuremberg trials where the hanging methods were deliberately used to make the Nazi prisoners suffer as long as possible before death.

Most of the other States began with hanging then moved to the use of poison gas with others to the electric chairs.

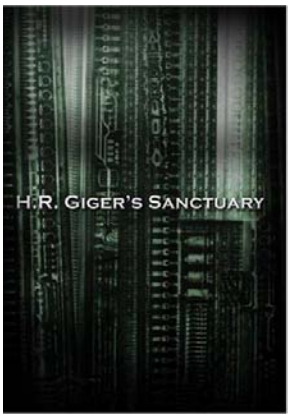
After a number of problems with the technology of the gas (in one case an inmate took 11 minutes to die), the majority of States either moved to the electric chair or to lethal injection. Again this episode examines the experience of many executioners including those who manned travelling electric chair vehicles ! There is also a discussion of the ethics of execution and the meaning of "cruel and unusual" punishment in terms of the American constitution.

This is a superb documentary which avoids sensationalism which examining a fascinating if not perhaps a little morbid subject. The unusual perspective it takes exploring the lives of the executioner creates a powerfully personal angle we helps us to appreciate the effect that taking such a job had on the individual and their family.

It is well presented with recreations, rare photographs, interviews and a good balance of early historical background, technical information and modern reflections on the use of capital punishment today.

Web: http://www.sirenvisual.com.au

H.R. Giger's Sanctuary
All Region DVD



The H.R. Sanctuary DVD is a glimpse into the strange world of dark artist H.R. Giger. Celebrated since the 1970's for such masterpieces as The Spell and his work on The Alien, Giger is a unique artist producing arresting and compelling works primarily using airbrush. His work has graced the covers of records (including the infamous Dead Kennedy's album covers) to the bigscreen in Alien 1 and 3. His various prints, books and products sell well around the world, yet in many ways he is a private and enigmatic individual.

This DVD gives us a short tour of his bar and museum which are located in his home town of Gruyeres, Switzerland. While this is certainly a competent documentary and I certainly enjoyed the art on show, it is way too short to be considered comprehensive.

Considering the reputation of Giger and the renown his work has achieved it should have been a lot longer and offered background on his childhood, artistic career and more comprehensive coverage of his work so forth.

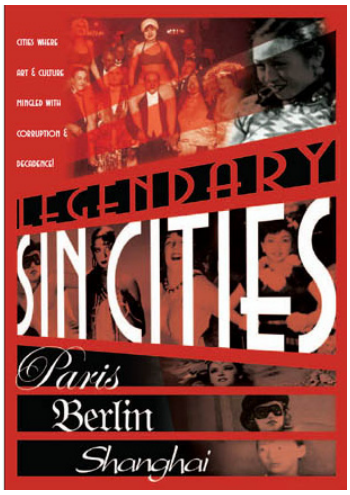
At times it is painfully tantalizing as it moves quickly past major works or just makes a passing reference to major stage in his career without offering any great detail. While it is certainly nice to see the "human" side of the great artist as he discusses his work and reflects on his career, I do not believe this is enough to carry the documentary.

There are a further twenty minutes of extras included deleted scenes, a fascinating analysis of one of his better known works "The Spell", trailers, reactions from museum visitors, a gallery and an evening with Giger. I cannot fault the extras, I especially found the analysis of "The Spell" informative, but again I come away unsatisfied.

This DVD as whole is a great appetizer but you are left feeling hungry for a more complete work.

Web: http://www.gigerfilm.com

Legendary Sin Cities
CBC Television
R1 DVD



Legendary Sin Cities is a fascinating documentary series by Canadian Television company CBC. It covers Berlin, Paris and Shanghai and has received exceptional press when it has been shown on TV, Cable and now on DVD. After the bloodbath of World War I drastic changes took place around the world, however, in certain unique locations, these changes including an immense sense of freedom and liberation. In three particular cities conditions gave rise to a truly libertine spirit where sexuality of all forms was openly expressed and the media was given free reign. In each of these cities freedom was a "two edged sword" matched with crime, poverty and deprivation and this darker side cannot be forgotten. However, the free spirit of each city also gave birth to unique expressions in art and culture.

In Berlin, this occurred during the twenties and gave rise to one of the most openly gay cultures known before Stonewall. However, it would be wrong to reduce what occurred to sexuality alone. Berlin attracted all manner of literary figures, musicians and artists from around the world and produced many individuals of world renown including Marlene Dietrich. It is amazing to think that Berlin also had its own Institute of Sexology, headed by Marcus Hirschfeld which fought for gender and sexual rights (including Gay rights) in the 1920's, one can only imagine what could have been achieved if his movement had not been cut short by the Nazis.

Paris in the 1920's is explored in the next episode and examines all manner of entertainment including the wide and diverse sexual environment. During the 1920's Paris had no less than 220 registered brothels that catered for all tastes. One of the unique aspects of Paris was the fact that it was so enamoured of Jazz that it welcomed with open arms African Americans at a time when their homeland was still gripped with racism. Jazz was all the rave and Josephine Baker become the celebrity of the period. The death of the Parisian experience was caused by the influx of way too many American tourists and then finally the money dried up in the Wall Street Crash and so many artists, living on incomes from home, could no longer afford to stay and the "Crazy Years" of Paris came to an end.

Shanghai during the 1930's was a strange and bizarre experience. It was packed with nightclubs never closed and hotels which supplied opium with your room service. It was a city where no passport was required so any number of escaping gangsters arrived each day mixed with refugees of all sorts. When some 20,000 white Russians fleeing the Soviet revolution flooded into Shanghai and could not find work, their wives and daughters took up prostitution and brothels multiplied overnight. The heated mix of crime, sex and drugs created a unique climate, where many of the crime lords were also the local police. A classic example being the case of Huang Jingrong, whose nickname was 'Pocked Marked Huang' - he was one of the most powerful gangsters in Shanghai and was also a major French Concession police detective.

This series is marked by a mixture of superb interviews, rare original footage and photographs and re-enactments. Each section also focuses in on specific individuals from the period and hence offers a "personal" view of the revolution that was taking place.

The filmmakers undertook extensive research to prepare these documentaries including contacting a wide range of authors and experts and hence while covering a perhaps controversial subject it is well grounded in fact.

My only misgiving is that with such an interesting and complex subject each episode is only around 50 minutes; it would have nice to have a bit more. That being said, there are extended interviews on the second disc in the package.

Mein Kampf
The Terrifying Rise and Ruin of Hitler's Third Reich
Director / Writer Erwin Leiser 1959
Big Sky Video
R4 DVD
Beyond Home Entertainment

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Erwin Leiser was a young Jewish schoolboy who left Germany as the Nazi attitude towards his people hardened. He lived in Sweden during the war, and elected to stay there for most of the rest of his life. From this vantage point he was able to observe the rise and fall of Nazi Germany. He was features editor at a Stockholm newspaper during the 1950s. In the late 50s he turned to documentaries, and this film was his first, produced in 1959. It is widely regarded as one of the best documentaries about Germany's National Socialist era. It uses footage from documentaries, propaganda and newsreels of the period.

The film's title was chosen carefully. Leiser selected it as a continuation of Hitler's book, showing the consequences on Germany and the world of National Socialism. Fortunately he also began with Germany during and after World War One, and this background goes a long way to explaining how the German people let Hitler get away with so much for so long. For all his later crimes, Hitler brought pride and relative prosperity back to a country humiliated by war.

Leiser had access to the Allies' captured film and propaganda archives, so was able to cut and edit them into a comprehensive documentary that shows both the political and domestic parts of the story.

It is to Leiser's credit that he presents the film as an academic piece, resisting the temptation to preach. This makes it far more watchable, and the lessons are more easily absorbed without having to be pounded in with propaganda. The propaganda is there, but it is to illustrate part of the story.

Even the Holocaust is dealt with carefully, and without the sensationalism and passion so prevalent whenever the subject is brought up. This segment is kept relatively short, enough to show it as part of the history of the war but not enough to overpower the rest of the story.

By contrast, the extra documentary included on the DVD, "Adolf Hitler", is a compilation from British, German and U.S. propaganda films and has all the worst of propaganda features. The British part appears to have been made just before the War started. It takes a mocking view of the Hitler phenomenon, using parts of German propaganda clips (some are the same clips seen in Mein Kampf) overdubbed with their own sneering commentary. While the original German clips were designed to lift the morale of the German people, the British commentary suggests that they seriously underestimated Hitler's importance. This supercilious attitude cost them dearly within a few years.

The U.S. part is a brief, fairly factual account of the life of Hitler and his impact on Germany. There are some "reenactments" for dramatic emphasis, but they don't do much for the film. There is much of Hitler's private film footage., but thankfully few interviews. The film completely ignores the politics of the period, however. Where Leiser takes time to develop Hitler's rise to power and the reasons for it, the U.S. documentary tries to fit too much history into too short a film.

The DVD is rounded out by a useful picture gallery and some extra trailers. The quality overall is about what you would expect from the 1950s. I would like to have seen a digitally cleaned-up version, but this may have lost some of the "period" look.

Overall it's an excellent package. Leiser's documentary is the best visual explanation of the Nazi period I have seen, and the extra features are useful and interesting. Big Sky Video are to be commended for rereleasing this valuable documentary.

Mein Kampf is primarily in English with some German footage with clear subtitles

Mythbusters
Beyond Home Entertainment
James Bond Special
Car Special: Volume 1 (2 Disc Set)

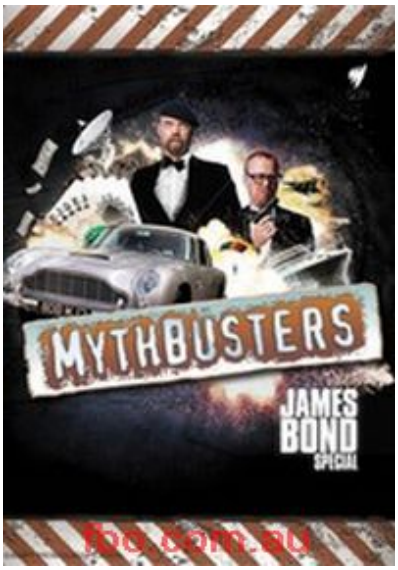
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

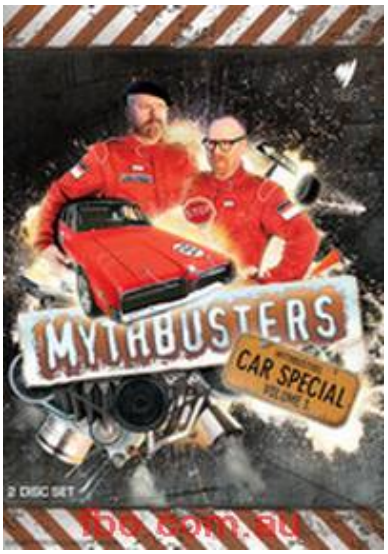
First, there was television. Its voracious appetite devoured much of what had already been put on film, until it developed its own programs. And so the evil Sitcom was inflicted on the world, and the Lowest Common Denominator triumphed in TV programming. There were valiant attempts to improve the quality of TV programs, but there are only so many Period Costume Dramas that can be inflicted on the viewers, and after a while even David Attenborough's beautiful documentaries of animals fornicating on the Serengeti Plains began to pall.

In recent years the growth of public access TV and specialist channels like Australia's SBS has widened the variety of shows presented. Quality shows from overseas made their appearance, and there was finally room for some quirky little shows to receive an airing.

Such a show was Mythbusters. A rough and ready show that doesn't take itself too seriously, Mythbusters takes on all those silly urban myths and stories and tests them to see if there might be a grain of truth in there somewhere. They also examine special effects from movies. They will try to recreate a myth then evaluate it to see if it qualifies as Confirmed, Plausible or Busted. Often they will then go further to see what it takes to make the story come true, if the myth version is Busted.

This further testing may involve large explosions, car crashes, people or objects falling from great heights, and explosions. The result is good compulsive viewing, and the show has developed a cult following. Produced by Australian company Beyond Television Productions for the Discovery Channel, Mythbusters is hosted by Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage, with a sometimes-changing cast of supporting mythbusters. Adam and Jamie are special effects producers based in California and are well qualified to recreate these myths.





The show has now been running for seven seasons. In this time they have amassed a large number of tests that are now being released as DVDs concentrating on a single theme.

We will look at the James Bond myths and the Cars Special DVDs.

James Bond movies specialized in gadgets and stunts, so they are a natural target for Mythbusters. Bullet-deflecting watches, exploding propane tanks, boats jumping cars, exploding pens – all get tested (and blown up if possible). A Gatling gun shooting incendiary bullets at a propane tank can be only be described, but not really imagined – until you see it here.

The 2-DVD Cars set begins with a touching scene as a young boy's dreams are realised – he gets to see his parents' car blown up. Twice. We study the effects of killer tissue boxes and bowling balls in car crashes. The myth about the difficulty of selling a car in which someone has died and putrefied is tested. Thankfully, TVs don't yet have Smell-O-Vision. Can a car thief be skewered by his door jemmy if the door airbag goes off?

Can the world's biggest subwoofer built into a car really blow the windows out? Can a car polevault if the tailshaft comes loose? Buy the set and find out.

The DVDs are great viewing. There is just enough science and design work to make the testing plausible, and enough explosions to keep you watching. Great fun, great value, great explosions.

War of the World
A New History of the 20th Century
Niall Ferguson
Siren Visual
R4 DVD

Published on the eve of the 20th century, H. G. Well's 'The War of the Worlds' (1898) is much more than just a seminal work of science fiction. It is also a kind of Darwinian morality tale, and at the same time, a work of singular prescience. In the century after the publication of his book, scenes like the ones Wells imagined became a reality in cities all over the world."

So begins Niall Ferguson's "War of the World," an astounding if not painful examination of the nature of the twentieth century especially focusing on the ethical question of why if the 20th century saw the greatest development of technology and standards of living and human rights was it also the bloodiest century in modern history.

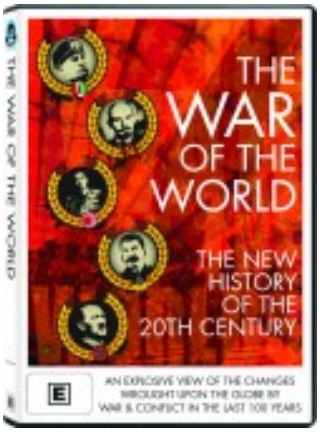
Professor Niall Ferguson is a cautious investigator and does not offer wild speculation or grandiose theories, he carefully analyses the historical evidence and offers three telling answers..."

"Three things seem to me necessary to explain the extreme violence of the 20th century. ... These may be summarized as ethnic conflict, economic volatility and empires in decline."

Ferguson has produced an epic book on the subject which comes in at around 650 pages and a far more approachable documentary series which has been released in Australia by Siren. The thing that stands out about this series is its extremely high production values and Ferguson's ability as a communicator. This is a powerful, confronting and at times distressing study which covers some of the most violent periods in modern history with nearly wholesale slaughter and genocide, yet Ferguson presents it in a manner that we can learn from.

His approach is not simply to document and certainly not to sensationalize, but to encourage us to examine the nature of many of the values that are the basis of "modern thinking" and consider how they have been involved in fanning the modern conflict.

He also considers the way in which a lack of understanding of diversity and the push to assimilation created the nightmare of ethnic conflict and racism from German Anti-Semitism through to Stalinist Ethnic cleansing. He also consider how easy hatred can develop even among those of similar cultural backgrounds (such as the English and Germans) and the way in which Empire was primarily at the root of these battles rather than socialism vs democracy etc as traditionally understood.



Ferguson argues that in the twentieth century it is the memes of empire and race that took control of our perception of the world rather than hereditary and hierarchy.

His analysis is compelling and significant as it is controversial. He sees the end of the "War of the World" with the Korean War and in my mind it is a little difficult to apply his analysis to the rise of Islam and terrorism since while these they have some racial overtones, they are primarily religious in nature.

While the modern of empire and race may explain the wars of the twentieth century I do not necessarily think this analysis is as compelling to today's world.

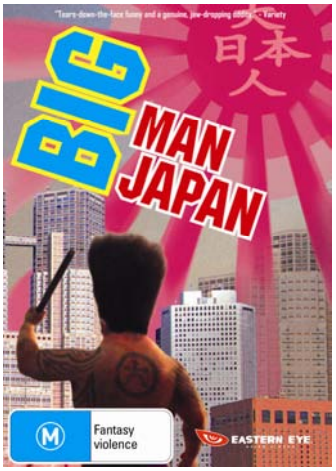
There has been much criticism of his work for reducing the complexity of the 20th century war experience to a series of limited factors, however, most historians do much the same, he has simply offered us a different "model" for understanding why the 20th century proved so violent and whether you agree with him or not, his work will prove thought provoking and challenging.

The DVD series is superbly produced, it shows rare footage, source materials and uses a wide range of cinematic styles to keep your attention through what is admittedly fairly difficult subject matter and what, at times, can be a fairly dense discussion.

It is a six part documentary series, 286 minutes in length and is certainly worth investing some time watching and discussing its contents.

WORLD CINEMA

Big Man Japan
Madman Ent. 2008
R4 DVD



Big Man Japan opens with the tale of Dai Sato, an alienated and isolated man. He lives life at a very slow pace, every move is cautious; he constantly carries an umbrella in case of rain. His house is in a bad part of town and is in a state of disrepair, his backyard is covered with broken home goods and stray animals roam from room to room. As we experience his world through the eyes of the interviewer we wonder why he is so significant.

We come to understand what he eats, the restaurants he frequents, the fact that he has an eight year old child and is separated from his wife. He also reluctantly tells us his income and how he survives on the meagre amount he receives.

As the interview continues he receives a number of phone calls and tells the interviewer he must report for work, this is when we realize he has an unusual job. It seems his family has a unique role in Japanese society; they are protectors of the state. However, they do not do so in a traditional military sense, it seems that through the use of electricity they can transform into “supersized” beings (hence his title - Dai Nipponjin Big Man Japan) and are called on to battle evil creatures which regularly attack Japanese cities. This is Godzilla in human form and he battles all manner of baddies (they are literally called Baddies) from a giant stinky baddies to a one footed baddie which attacks with its eye.

However, just as Japanese society has modernized and the old values have been left in the past so the role of the Big Man is being reappraised. In the world of television and the internet Dai Nipponjin is no longer the great thing he was and the monsters of the past do not seem to appear as often. The last Dai Nipponjin is now in a nursing home with dementia.

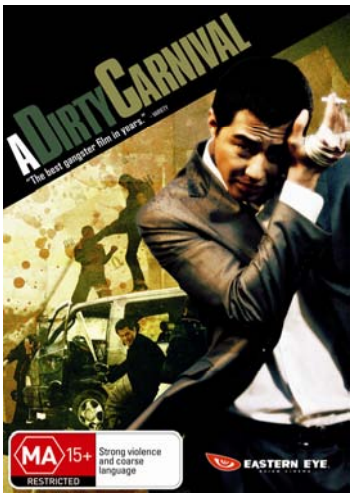
In the past there were many Big Men and the monsters were fast and furious, now there is one jaded Big Man who had his body branded with product labelling to make ends meet ! However, he is getting older and losing his edge, not only is he thrashed by a new baddie on the scene but drops an innocent baby baddie who tries to feed on his nipple !! He is not as popular as he used to be.

This is a strange and quirky piece of Japanese cinema which on one level is a very fun monster film, the baddies are great and the battles are fun. The special effects are very well done and the baddies look awesome. The way in which the film is presented as a documentary is convincing and the juxtaposition of the total ordinariness and banality of Dai’s life with his status as a jaded giant superhero is beautifully played.

On another level Big Man Japan has quit a bit to say about the clash of the traditional society with modernity, the power of the media and fickleness of the mob. It is a rather unique experience, there are not many films about a 30 foot aging and unemployed superhero who has become the laughing stock of his country and is losing in the TV ratings !! It seems Big Man Japan is the tale of the world’s worst superhero !

Web: http://www.madman.com.au

A Dirty Carnival
Eastern Eye / Madman 2008
South Korean, subtitled in English
Director Yoo Ha



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

The story is about betrayal, of family, friends, and workmates. Byung Doo (played by Cho In Sung) is a gangster – a minor street soldier with a low-quality gang led by a Boss who treats his men with contempt and cheats them of their share of money. He answers to a Big Boss, Mr Hwang (Chun Ho Jin) who is more of a businessman and relies on the gangs to do his dirty work. Byung Doo is trying to support his family, who are being pressured into moving out of their house to make way for a new housing development. On the wages he gets from his Boss he can barely make ends meet, but he must lie to his family and promise them a better life in the future. Things seem to be looking up when he is given the management of a new games room run by the gang, but he is betrayed by the Boss when the job (and the higher income that would go with it) is given to another gang member.

To get ahead in the organization he must attract a high level sponsor who will ensure that he gets better jobs and better pay. The Big Boss is having trouble with a local criminal prosecutor, so Byung Doo decides to attract the Big Boss's attention by doing away with the problem. The weapon of choice is the baseball bat, since guns are sure to bring the full wrath of the police down on the gangs. Byung Doo escalates this and knifes the attorney. Although the Big Boss is pleased and sponsors Byung Doo, his gang Boss is displeased that Byung Doo has betrayed him and gone behind his back to take on the job. As Byung Doo rises through the ranks, it is obvious that he or the Boss must die.

From here the plot becomes increasingly complex as Byung Doo becomes more violent to hold his higher place in the ranks. His situation is complicated by an old school girlfriend, and another friend from school who wants to make a movie about gangsters and pumps Byung Doo for information to make his story realistic. He is also being hunted by other gangs who have scores to settle with him for the violence and killing he has done to their members. His rise in the ranks is matched by the rise in the number of his enemies. Even the Big Boss is concerned about his relationship with the film maker and whether Byung Doo has inadvertently linked him to the violence. Byung Doo must try to balance his deepening criminal life with his private life.

Much of the action takes place at night, giving the whole film a slightly underworld look. The actors are convincing, the plot is well directed and tightly scripted. The more pleasant moments as Byung Doo meets up with his old school friends again only counterpoint the violence that keeps intruding on his life.

This could be just another violent movie, but the development of Byung Doo's character lift it above the ordinary. The Korean culture of obedience and loyalty to their Boss does not seem at all unusual in the context of this film. If anything, Yoo Ha's message seems to be "stay loyal to your Boss or bad luck will come your way". Since he has gone to so much trouble to develop each of the gangsters' personalities this message does not seem at all unusual. Unfortunately there is so much betrayal that there is going to be a lot of bad luck following on. It is strange to call this a "human" gangster movie, but that is what it is.

On the negative side, to viewers used to sudden clean deaths from gunshots, the baseball bat brawls and knifings come as a bit of a graphic shock. It is not a film for the kiddies. The subtitles are in clear yellow on a black background, but are often rather crudely translated into broken English. These minor problems aside, it is a fine film in which the underworld of a foreign culture is translated into a Western style really well.

Web: http://www.madman.com.au

Ebola Syndrome
R4 DVD
Siren Visual

Ebola Syndrome is a film that polarises viewers, it has been described as nauseating, sleazy and offensive and regardless of how you view the gore and violence, the plot has certainly been written for maximum impact. This is Hong Kong cinema at the edge.

Kai has a short fuse; he has been pushed around all of his life and reacts with a disproportionate level of fury and violence when pushed too far. The film opens when he is having a fling with the boss's wife, it seems this is a very regular occurrence when the boss is away - initiated by his rather bored and spoilt wife. However, this time the boss comes home early and catches them right at the wrong moment. The wife pleads innocence and blames Kai. The Boos begins to kick the hell out of Kai. He pulls a knife and demands Kai castrate himself, instead Kai screams " Stop Bullying Me!" (an re-occurring phrase throughout the film) and brutally kills the boss, his offsider and his wife.

He goes to finish the job by dousing the bosses' daughter in fuel, but when interrupted he runs for his life. Now he is wanted for triple murder so he flees to South Africa to work cheaply in a Chinese restaurant. They know his past and use him for cheap labour and he has no choice but to accept the conditions he is under. Once again the boss pays him cheaply and the bosses wife abuses him.

Being Chinese in South Africa is not easy, the White population treat them as Blacks and the Blacks see them as whites, Kai's fuse is slowly being lit. Since the local butchers are charging the restaurant a fortune for meat, they travel to Zulu territory to buy some pig carcasses. The village has been devastated by some sort of virus and the tribe is undertaking a rite of cleansing, they buy the carcases and get out of there quick. On the way back, Kai crashes into a tree and after a clash with the boss stamps off in fury.

He finds a local African woman semi-comatose and clearly unwell by the riverside and decides to make the most of it – that's the sort of guy Kai is. During the rape she has some sort of convulsion and so he has to smash her head in to escape her "grip". I did mention this was a mean spirited film!

When they return Kai develops a fever but, of course, they cannot take him to a hospital. The doctor gives them some medicine but with further research warms them of the Ebola risk. However, Kai seems to get better. However, if truth be known, Kai is one of the rare people (one in ten million) who the virus does not kill but turns into carriers. He is now far more dangerous than any of them know.

Things go from bad to worse when the bosses' wife decides to dump him in the forest to avoid being caught with his body if he dies from the illness. This pushes him too far. He yells " Stop Bullying Me!" and attacks her, beats her and rapes her, when the husband returns home and interrupts, he brutally kills him (using the restaurant's doors no less) and then returns to finish the wife. He also kills a cousin who turns up while he is cleaning up the mess. Kali then drags them into the kitchen and using a electric blade turns them into "African Burgers" which he sells as a new product line...

Just as he thinks he has it made, the child who survived his first rampage (now an adult), identifies him and so he must make a quick escape to Hong Kong. Of course, this is not before a major outbreak of Ebola in Johannesburg, but by the time it is traced to the restaurant he is a long way away and the virus is fast spreading...

This is a dark, vicious and violent film. Anthony Wong as Kai is impressively monstrous, while we may try to develop some sympathy for his plight as someone who had been “pushed too far” by life, it is next to impossible to do so. He is just too sleazy and revolting. The film itself is packed by sex, bodily fluids, gore, violence and death. There is certainly some sex and even occasional nudity, but it too has been used in such a way that is makes the viewer uncomfortable and revolted. Kai’s sex life is certainly not appealing. The plot seem deliberately written to shock and appal with nobody spared, from woman and children to innocent bystanders !

That being said there are some intriguing themes. Class, for example, is explored, as Kai is clearly used and abused by those who have money, from his first boss and his wife, to his second boss at the Chinese Restaurant. There is also a powerful portrayal of Chinese life in South Africa during the Apartheid period.

Obviously quite a bit of research was undertaken on Ebola and this shows throughout the film ranging from the perfectly played sense of fear and paranoia to the depictions of the virus spreading via bodily fluids and of course the autopsy. While there is lots of violence, the mood is enhanced by powerfully simple images such as Kai coughing or people simply falling and shaking in convulsion. The mood of the Ebola Syndrome is as powerful as the effects and violence.

The Ebola Syndrome will challenge many; it is shocking, violent and filled with gore. However, it creates a superb sense of dread and paranoia and is packed with such dislikeable characters and written with such a mean spirited plot that it is actually quite a unique piece of “shock cinema” .

It is a classic example of extreme Hong Kong cinema and definitely worth seeing.

Web: http://www.sirenvisual.com.au

Monkey Magic
Chihiro Kameyama
R4 DVD
Eastern Eye
Madman

Reviewer: Jeremy Kong

Monkey is the story by Wu Ch'êng-ên based on the ancient Chinese legend tracing the origins of Buddhism. It follows the adventures of the priest (Tripitaka if you know the old cult favourite) and disciples Pigsy, Sandy and Goku (Monkey).

The movie deals with one of the adventures that they fall into, during their journey from China to India in search of the holy sutras (writings) which will save the world.

It starts as usual with the group trekking their way towards India, fighting with each other and complaining about lack of food. They end up in the city of the fierce sounding Tiger People where they discover that there is a prophecy about "the priest" saving the local rulers. Two evil goblins, Silver Horn and Gold Horn, have turned the once fertile Tiger Kingdom into a barren desert, and have turned the King and Queen into turtles. Princess Rei enlists the help of the travellers to go to the lair of the two goblins and help return her parents to human form.

What ensues is a typical Monkey adventure, with all the usual fights, bad jokes, and bawdy humour - but sadly not as much as was in the 1978 TV series, Monkey, that we older generation grew up with. As a fan of the TV series, I came to view this movie with much anticipation, and expectations of a nostalgic fun-filled couple of hours. Unfortunately, the 2007 "Monkey Magic" just didn't quite get there for me. It started poorly for me when the opening titles were so dismally boring compared to the 1978 song that you couldn't get out of your head (you are all starting to sing "funkiest Monkey that ever popped" I bet).

Then, I found it hard to watch Monkey with bleached blonde hair (OK, so he's the king of the monkeys and I guess he can colour his hair whatever he wants, but really). It also really grated on my nerves to hear monkey

scream just about every line he had in the whole movie - there was very little light and shade to his characterisation.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Pigsy turned in a lacklustre performance. He didn't chase women, he was hardly bawdy at all, and he never inhaled his food! The Pigsy character is actually supposed to resemble a pig - he's supposed to be a base, carnal creature. The director needed to turn down Monkey, and turn up the pig!

The other characters just didn't seem quite right, either. Sandy just didn't do anything at all that would indicate he was a river spirit; and the priest (he is not named Tripitaka in this version) has no opportunity other than to be colourless. Not only that, these "legendary fighters" seemed to lack fighting ability, which made for fairly dull fight scenes, and made me ponder why anyone would seek their help.

Probably most disappointing of all was that Monkey didn't use his cool "whistle manoeuvre" to call up his cloud, and when his cloud showed up it was a wacky coloured LEAF (what the?!) that looked strangely like a surf board during the flying scenes. Meanwhile, the goblin got a menacingly dark grey cloud with glowing blue lights (one of the better special effects) - poor Monkey looked a bit pathetic by comparison!

Other areas where the movie fell short were the cartoon like sound effects, appalling green screen special effects (oddly mixed with some reasonable CGI efforts), and some rather dubious subtitles such as the Silver Goblin saying "What a schlep" and "Drat" (mind you, at least the sub-titles made me laugh, as opposed to the rest of the movie).

The screenplay had a few holes, and there were a few characters who were introduced without any real reason, including one whose sole role was seemingly to provide bodily noises in an attempt at humour.

I understand that the director may have wanted to differentiate this movie from previous versions of the story, but there is differentiation and then there is also missing the mark completely! I also think the director was confused about his target market and about what style to use. He's ended up with an uncomfortable mix of unsophisticated slap-stick, unsubtle humour, cartoonish features and cartoonish characterisation of Monkey; along with subdued acting from the rest of the cast.

Despite its flaws, it was a reasonably enjoyable movie, but fans of the 1978 "Monkey Magic" series will probably be disappointed. There were none of the old classic moments, nor any classic-worthy moments, in this movie. It is probably better suited to 12-14 year olds rather than mature fans.

Web: http://www.madman.com.au

Sauna
Bronson Film Club

The date is 1595, there has been a twenty five year war between Sweden and Russia and as last it is over.

However, there are borders to be drawn by agreement between the two countries and two brothers, Eerik and Knut join the commission. They are Finnish by birth but live in Sweden and it seems will receive land as payment for their duty.

The brothers are very different in nature but each complex in their own right. Knut is somewhat of a scholar, drawn in to the commission by his brother. Eerik has been worn down by years of brutal fighting and has begun to kill with abandon; he seems to no longer need any justification for his extreme violence.

On the trek to join the commission they encounter a family and decide to look for provisions.

While Knut tries to negotiate and take a reasoned approach, Eerik kills the father but leaves the young daughter alive. Knut is clearly attracted to the young girl and to protect her from both Eerik's violence and his own lust, locks her in the cellar. Eerik claims they will return to release her; however she is left to die.

As the commission moves along the borders creating maps and dividing territories, tensions arise between the various parties. Eerik is violent and borders on sociopathic, he has been so traumatized by war that he will never be able to return to civilian life. Knut is uncomfortable with his duties and cannot wait to return to a post at a Swedish university. The Russian side is likewise eccentric.

As they plot their course they encounter an uncharted swamp and as they enter the region Knut begins to experience very disturbing visions of the girl they left in the cellar. She seems to be following them but appears in a decayed state, tearing at her face with no eyes.

They become disoriented and lost and the compass seems to be giving directions that do not make sense, suddenly they find themselves in a very strange village.

For a start, the peasants are all remarkably clean, there is only one child and they do not identify as Swedish or Russian. There is also no church, only a strange minimalist stone like structure which is the Sauna, it seems it has been there a very long time.

The history of the village is likewise bizarre, the Sauna seems to be of Pagan origin and an Orthodox monastery was build beside it. The monks believed it could cleanse sin without prayer or repentance, but at a cost. When the townspeople found the village it was empty, there were just the abandoned robes of the monks and some strange and indeed very dark icons and books.

Eerik notes that he had killed seventy three people and that the village has seventy three occupants, is there a connection?

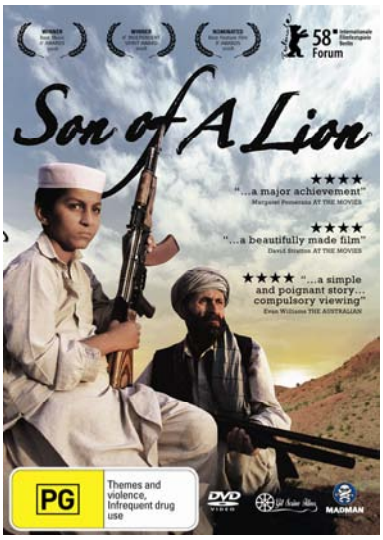
Sauna is a very complex and unusual film. As soon as it begins you are struck by the intelligence of the script, the beauty of the scenery and the superb soundtrack. At the same time this is a plot not easily deciphered, it is filled with discussions of the nature of war, sin and redemption as well as the exploration of the short comings of the human character. There is an intertwining of both Christian and Pagan themes as well as social commentary.

There are so many different possible interpretations of the village that the ambiguity of plot adds a real edge to the story. The whole film has a mood of suspense and tension that is superbly haunting. When the horror elements erupt you certainly know it and the final scene with the faceless figure is truly shocking.

This is a film marked by great beauty, depth and reflection; there is a lot of character development, a philosophical dimension and great horror and terror. It is a superbly "European" style horror film which matches its horror with its intelligence and style. I aim to watch this a few times to digest it !

Web: http://www.bronsonclub.com/
Web: http://www.washyoursins.com

Son of a Lion
Madman
2009
R4 DVD



Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

In the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, on the Afghanistan border, is the town of Darra. For generations its men have made weapons. Niaz is the eleven year old son of Sher Alam, a local weapon maker and ex-Mujahideen fighter in Afghanistan.

He is expected to follow in his father's trade, but Niaz has no interest in gun smithing – he wants to go to school and learn to read and write. His father has forbidden this, but his uncle is trying to get Niaz enrolled before he is too old.

The film looks at the clash of cultures between the old and proud Pashtun warrior traditions and the change to a more modern outlook. Niaz is caught in the middle. The different attitudes show up in the discussions of the men in the evening at the tea house.

They are politically aware, and the contrasting attitudes are summed up by the men themselves – advocates for the old ways, based on their Islamic beliefs, or a more progressive outlook to allow Islam to be acceptable to the rest of the world.

They are also well aware of the terrorists and the political problems on their doorstep. Some have fought in the Afghan war against the Russians, where they were themselves labelled as terrorists.

This is all set against a background of gunfire as the buyers try out their new weapons. The village is more affected by the accidental deaths due to stray shots than by any war. Sher Alam starts to feel that the villagers are taking Niaz' side against him, and the tension between father and son grows.

The film is set against the harsh, beautiful mountain scenery of the area. It has no political point to make, and may even have been neutralized a little to remain inoffensive so the viewer can absorb the spectacular scenery and the rich culture and the people.

This is appropriate, since the story is seen from Niaz' point of view as a child, not a politically aware adult. In so many ways they are just normal people living a normal life with normal problems and we can identify easily with them. Against this normalcy, Niaz' wish to be educated is all the more significant. Something that we take for granted is denied to him because of the old narrow culture (represented by his father) holding back change.

The film is subtitled in white, and the titles are sometimes lost against the background. This is the only flaw of note that I found in the film. Australian director and writer Benjamin Gilmour has done a brilliant job bringing out the people and their culture, rough bits and all.

All the actors are locals. His original script was intended to correct some of the stranger Western ideas about Islamic life, but it was rewritten after consulting with the local people. Although their acting skills are not great, for a simple story in a low-budget film they have turned out an excellent, sensitive and thoroughly entertaining work.

Web: http://www.madman.com.au

A Wonderful Night in Split
Dir. Arsen Anton Ostojic
Croatian, English subtitles, 2004
First Run
Features
R1 DVD

Croatia does not readily spring to mind as a film-making country. Relatively poor, recently wracked by civil and ethnic war, it is one of those countries which has seen its share of trouble and whose residents just want to get on with life. This film is set on New Year's Eve, between ten o'clock and midnight, against a backdrop of a concert and fireworks in the city of Split's central Square. Many people have come out of their homes for this one bright moment in their lives (the "Wonderful Night" of the title).

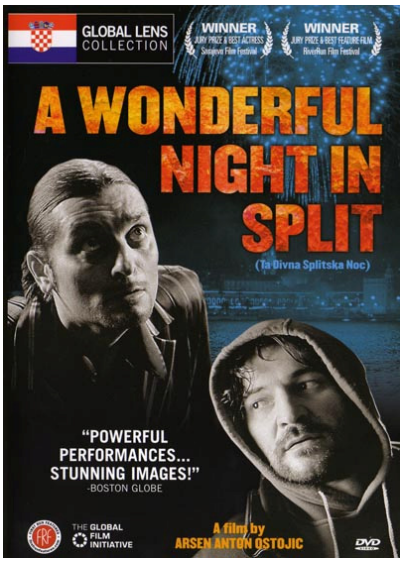
Against this, however, the film chronicles a group of people whose generally seedy little lives are about to become tragically entangled.

We start with a young ex-army drug dealer who is set to make a drug delivery trip to Munich, in spite of his promise to spend New Year's Eve with his girlfriend and her young son.

A group of American sailors is looking for a girl for the night for their severely depressed buddy, who has just found out that his girlfriend back home is going to marry his best friend. A young Croatian girl is desperately looking for a drug fix to get her through the night.

The only potential bright spot is the two young lovers who are simply looking for a quiet, private spot to have sex, but even their lives will become intertwined in the sordid story as it unfolds.

The pleasure of the crowd watching the concert and fireworks is always in the background, but it seems irrelevant in the narrow alleys, old buildings and run-down rooms in the city center.



The overall

depressing atmosphere is strengthened by Mirko Pivcevic's stark and gloomy black and white camerawork - if anything, it only highlights the run down area and hopeless social problems. Even the happy concert crowd seems to fade into the background in his footage, and does little to lift the mood.

In spite of what appears to be negatives, the film is compelling. I can't quite work out why – I can find little sympathy for the characters, the scenery is depressing, the social problems predictable, and even the minor characters are just desperately trying to get on with their lives as best they can. The white subtitles sometimes get lost against the picture, although they carry the feeling of the dialogue quite well in spite of the odd mistranslation.

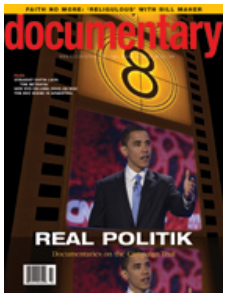
Perhaps it is the tightly-scripted plot that makes the story so watchable, with the separate plot-lines coming together much like they do in Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" – there is a little satisfaction as each piece of the plot falls into place. Perhaps it's the brilliant acting. There are no particular outstanding roles, but each one is acted flawlessly. The film is certainly not a tourist advertisement for Split, but it's a good advert for Croatian film.

The film has won a large number of Film Festival awards so far, and was released by the Global Film Initiative to tour the United States. In 2005 it won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It is director Ostojic's first full-length feature film. Extras include Director's notes and background on Croatia and its history.

First Run Features
Global Lens Collection
Web: http://firstrunfeatures.com

MAGAZINES IN REVIEW

Documentary Magazine International Documentary Association Quarterly



Documentary Magazine is published by the International Documentary Association and is a high quality quarterly magazine of around 100 pages plus. Every issue offers regular features including Docs on Screen, Festival Wrap Up, Member News, Doc Tech, Documentary News Brief and Awards Round Up.

There is a good balance between reviews of documentaries (both major releases and lesser known film festival titles) and technical articles covering both the "how to" of documentary filmmaking and studies of individual filmmakers. Many of the issues also have a specific focus ranging from documentaries on the campaign trail (Fall 2008) to The Bourne Legacy focusing on the work of St.Claire Bourne who died in December 2007.

The online site for the International Documentary Association is exceptional offering lots of news, sample articles, video interviews, trailers and "how to" tutorials.

Web: http://www.documentary.org/

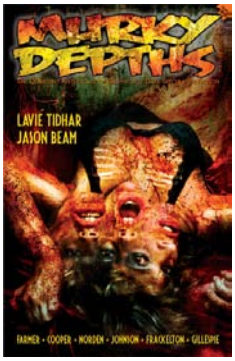
Morpheus Tales #2

In an earlier issue of Synergy we reviewed Morpheus Tales as one of the major upcoming magazines in dark fantasy and related genres and issue #2 certainly backs up our contention. The first thing you notice is a further refinement of the presentation with some excellent use of colour, the interview with Jason Beam, for example, a dark and nightmare like artist, really stands out when you see his images in colour. The front cover is appealing and attention getting (also being an image by Jason Beam).

The content is likewise impressive with some superb stories and great interviews. The way in which the tales are presented in Morpheus Tales is quite noteworthy as each is illustrated by a different artist, so you not only get some truly strange, dark and evocative tales but amazing art to go with them. This mixture of both literary and visual content makes Morpheus Tales very appealing. There are also two in-depth interviews with surreal and dark artist Jason Beam and with author Joseph McGee. Issue #2 is completed with some reviews of relevant books, films and comics.

Web: http://www.morpheustales.com

Murky Depths #6



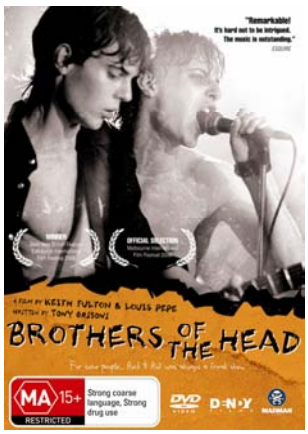
Murky Depths seems to be getting better each issue. Issue #6 includes a superb cover by Jason Beam as well as an in depth interview with him. While all the stories are superbly illustrated, issue #6 includes four full length comics which are superb mixture of compelling storytelling and amazing illustration. The Factory is incredibly evocative, while Hellbound is just plain transgressive. There is even a couple of Christmas stories, there is the darkly named The Butcher and the Fly keeper and the sci-fi tale "All I want for Christmas".

What stands out in each issue of Murky Depth is the way in which fiction and art intertwine; every story is superbly illustrated in such a way that the art becomes integral to the tale. This mixture of superb fiction and visual extravagance makes each issue of Murky Depths an exciting experience.

Web: http://www.murkydepths

MUSIC IN REVIEW

Brothers of the Head
R4 DVD
Madman
Entertainment 2008



Brothers of the Head is a strange and unusual faux documentary. It takes us on a journey with brothers Tom (Harry Treadaway) and Barry (Luke Treadaway), conjoined twins (joined at the stomach) who were sold in their teens to a showman looking for a new band to promote. Zak Bedderwick is a failed showman who has not had a success in quite a while and his manager Nick Sydney (Sean Harris) will do anything it takes to achieve success.

The movie opens deliberately playing with the multiple levels of deception within the film itself, we see a superbly produced "Gothic" scene showing the twins being taken from their isolated country home and then the producer calls cut and we realize it is a film within a film. Using deliberately aged film stocks and interviews with people like Ken Russell and Brian Aldis the filmmakers create a truly superb mood of authenticity which really takes you in.

Slowly, the boys develop their own personalities, as Barry becomes more out of control, their act becomes a punk rock explosion and their psychological lives begin to disintegrate. As love and desire enter the picture and Barry wants his freedom to follow his love for Laura, things go very wrong.

What is especially interesting is that that the film uses all sorts of different cinematic styles from lineal filmmaking to steady cam and super 8 footage to interviews. In the end we never quite know what happens to the conjoined twins and this leaves us even more uncomfortable than if the film gave us the whole story.

The exploration of exploitation, violence, manipulation and the cost of fame is superbly done within the context of a very unusual story.

This is the second film from Fulton and Louis Pepe who make Lost in La Manchu on the strange world of Terry Gilliam; it is dark, moody and at times perversely homo-erotic film. It is filled with music from the 70's punk rock scene and is certainly quite in a category of its own.

Web: http://www.madman.com.au

Cinecocktail
Calibro 3
Beat Records
2007

Italy was celebrated for its wild crime and cop films during the Seventies. While filmmakers such as Dario Argento may be well known by younger fans for his horror films, his many Giallo titles were what first brought him his first recognition. Indeed, many of his crime films right up to the Stendhal Syndrome and hopefully to his new film, Giallo, stand equal in creativity and innovation to his more horror oriented output.

Giallo was a form of Italian literature which was primarily sold in cheap yellow paperbacks, hence the title – Giallo which means Yellow. It was marked by crime, lurid content and eroticism. The films, like the books, had quirky and convoluted plots and were populated by strange people doing very bizarre things, in most cases, in very violent ways and usually coupled with steaming sexuality of all possible forms.

At the same time one of the things that made the Italian Giallo films so memorable was the

music score. In most cases these scores were so superb that they could easily stand on their own as works of musical creativity and indeed many did so. Some of the more impressive soundtracks came from the Seventies action cop genre and this is a great selection of rare tracks. It is beautifully presented in a 3 fold digipack with original artworks and English liner notes.

Cinecocktail Calibro 3 includes La polizia incrimina, la legge assolve - Roma violenta - Napoli violenta - Napoli Spara - Milano rovente - A tutte le auto della polizia - The big game - Il consigliori - Il prefetto di ferro - Liberi armati e pericolosi and many never released before tracks!

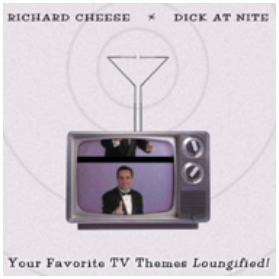
This is a rare CD edition indeed and will be greatly enjoyed by both lovers of genre cinema and devotees of soundtracks.

In the same package is a DVD which is a 1h 15min long documentary called Il Genere covering Italian cop films and the music that accompanied them. It includes sections of the Cinevento De Masi 2007 with various filmmakers offering their memories and reflections, intercut with insightful interviews with major composers and musicians. Interviewees include Alessandro Alessandroni, Francesco De Masi and Edda Dell'Orso alongside directors such as Mario Caiano and Umberto Lenzi. There are also live performances and various tracks from the album are also played in the background during various interviews. This is a high quality doco with lots of interesting content, it has English subtitles.

Cinecocktail Calibro 3 is a great combination of a superb audio CD and a highly informative DVD

Web: http://www.beatrecords.it/

Dick at Night
Richard Cheese



America's strangest lounge singer Richard Cheese sings swingin' Vegas versions of rock, rap, and Top40 hits, "swankifying" contemporary songs into traditional pop vocal standards. With his swanky Lounge Against The Machine swing band, his tiger-striped tuxedo, and his enormous microphone, Cheese presents the perfect mix of music, martini, and madcap.

Just imagine Sinatra singing a Radiohead song, and you've got Dick. He regularly chooses songs which have mature lyrics, outrageous themes and language and turns them into a music sensations, you should hear what he does with I like Big Butts.

Cheese has sold more than 150,000 CDs, and his albums are available in retail stores, on iTunes, and at his official website richardcheese.com. His albums include Lounge Against the Machine, Tuxicity, I'd like a Virgin, Aperitif for Destruction, The Sunny Side of the Moon, Silent Nightclub and Dick at Night.

The finger-snapping, liquor-lapping, nightcapping crooner first stepped into the spotlight in 2000 with his Lounge Against the Machine CD. This critically acclaimed album featured "swankified" versions of alternative rock songs, such as Radiohead's CREEP and Limp Bizkit's NOOKIE, arranged for a big band sound. Thanks to radio stations including KROQ/Los Angeles, Z100/New York City, and the nationally-syndicated Dr. Demento Show, Cheese soon found an audience that shared his love of lounge music, including rockstar Brian Setzer, who hired Richard Cheese & Lounge Against The Machine to play at his private Christmas party!

Soon, Dick landed a gig as the co-host and bandleader on MTV's "Say What Karaoke" series. He was also interviewed in 2001 on CNN, profiled in The Los Angeles Times, and featured as a category on VH1's "Rock 'N' Roll Jeopardy." Dick also headlined frequent concerts at The House Of Blues in Los Angeles and Anaheim, The Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, and radio station festivals like 91X X-Fest in San Diego, The WHFS HFSmas Nutcracker

in Washington DC's Patriot Center, and the Y100 Feztival at Philadelphia's Tweeter Center. Richard Cheese was also hired to entertain at Blink182 drummer Travis Barker's first wedding!

He has released seven CDs thus far and his latest is Dick at Night. This album features lounge-style versions of classic TV theme songs, including The Brady Bunch, Gilligan's Island and South Park.

The album was also released on iTunes with exclusive bonus tracks, and several of Dick's tracks were featured in promotional events for TVLand.

In 2009 he has three CDs scheduled for release, so check the website and have a look at the Richard Cheese membership system, if you join now you can get these CDs cheap and before anybody else !

Web: http://www.richardcheese.com

Jagged Edge
Gary Numan
NuStreet 2008

Gary Numan is firmly locked in my memory as the spectre of my youth with his strange robotic music which resonated with electro minimalism and was different from anything I had heard before.

Of course, it was also his unique image, cold, unwavering, singing with a unique voice and with a superb presentation and look. Are my Friends Electric and Cars spoke of the alienation and despair of my generation.

However, as we all know many artists attempt to live in the past and do not make the transition through time especially well. I am pleased to note that Gary Numan has evolved and developed his sound into something which is still edgy, moody and atmospheric, not only that it is eminently relevant.

Jagged Edge is a superbly accomplished album which while still have the haunting voice that makes Numan something special, has a sound that borders on industrial and dark electronica. He could easily be compared favourably with Nine Inch Nails and at times even Marilyn Manson.

This is a superbly dark and evocative piece of work which offers a diverse range of tracks, some are more ambient and atmospheric and others are have a more lyrical quality which speak of the fears and isolation many of us would prefer to leave hidden.

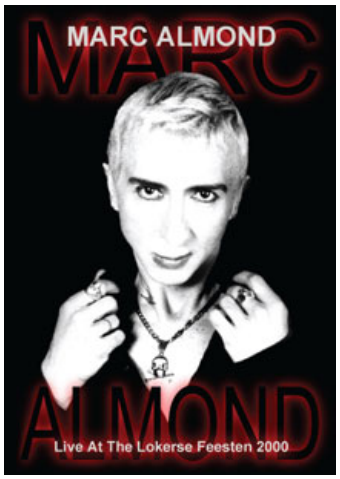
At times the tracks are quite nightmarish, others quite sublime. Jagged Edge is a reworking of songs originally released on Jagged (2006) which achieved quite some acclaim for Numan, some are simply alternative versions, others are radically different and nearly unidentifiable.

It is a double album which is creates such a mood it cannot be ignored; there is not a track which does not work. The production values are superb and it evokes such feelings of melancholy and sadness, joy and bliss, rising up and crashing down again that it is quite a journey.

I truly love this album; every time I play it I hear something more and I recommend it most highly.

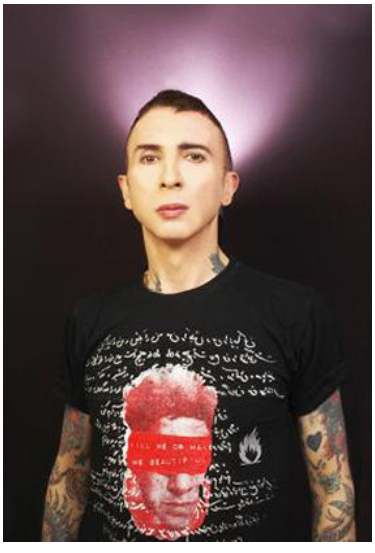
NuStreet
Web: http://www.numan.co.uk/

Marc Almond
Live at Lokerse Feesten 2000
CD/DVD Combo
Charley Films
Region 0 DVD
MVD



Marc Almond is a unique cultural and musical icon. His startling entrance into the world of music was marked by the daring "Tainted Love" of Soft Cell which was quite "in your face" for the day when homosexuality was still somewhat hush hush, especially considering his effete look and flamboyant stage presence. He has always worked to push himself into new territories and musical forms and this has continued to his present day exploration of all manner of music presence. He has always worked to push himself into new territories and musical forms and this has continued to his present day exploration of all manner of music from folk ballads to torch songs. He is never simply defined and easily moves between all musical genres deliberately adapting them to his own unique style and presentation.

In many ways Almond is a complete performance, while many may critique his voice, he knows his limitations and is a complete package – music, songs, performance and emotion. It is too simple to try and reduce him to one medium alone. He has never been a one hit wonder regardless of the success of Soft Cell and this is not diminishing their success or significance.



In this superb offering we get both a CD and DVD release of a show that occurred in Brussels in 2000. He is accompanied by a key board player, a guitarist and some backing tracks and does wonders.

This a great " best of" presentation, offering tracks from a wide range of albums. It is quite a diverse presentation from early dance type tracks to sleazy cabaret and torch songs. A marvellous selection.

The audio CD is clear and excellent, but the DVD is marvellous, the Dolby Digital 5.1 makes you feel like you are right at the show, it also comes with an interview, biography and Discography. It is nicely presented in a dual disc case with a booklet.

Web: http://www.mvdb2b.com/

The Old Road
Martin Orford
Giant Electric Pea 2008

Martin Orford is best known for his 26-year career as keyboardist and main songwriter with legendary progressive rock band IQ, though he was also a significant player for many years in Jadis and also the John Wetton band. He released his first solo album "Classical Music and Popular Songs" to critical acclaim in September 2000.

Martin left IQ in the autumn of 2007 to work on solo material, and "The Old Road" is the culmination of this project

The album features an all-star line-up including John Wetton (Asia), Nick D'Virgilio and Dave Meros (Spock's Beard), John Mitchell (It Bites/ Arena), Dave Oberlê (Gryphon), Gary Chandler (Jadis) and Steve Thorne.

Martin describes the album as "unashamedly retro and proud of it", and the overall theme of the CD reflects a celebration of traditional ways and a rejection of the less attractive aspects of the 21st century.

The Old Road is an interesting "Prog Rock album" which embodies a certain vision of music which has sadly been long left behind. It has so many musical resonances from early Genesis to the "Voyage of the Acolyte", I always loved Prog Rock and this is a great experience.

It is certainly an exploration of the early Progressive sound and has is a utterly superb retro experience, at the same time it not just going over the same territory and has been placed within a modern "musical" context and shows a lot of innovation and unique talent in its own right. It is certainly not derivative.

Orford has advised he is withdrawing from the music industry in reaction to the internet and the modern free music culture. It will be our loss considering the beauty of this album.

Web: http://www.gep.co.uk

Satanik
Original Movie Soundtrack
Beat Records
Italy

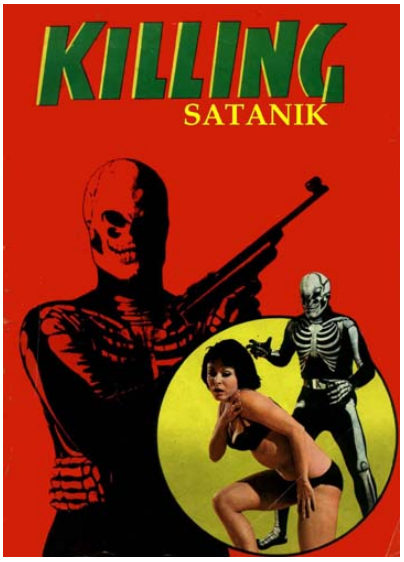
Satanik was an Italian noir comic book created in 1964 by Max Bunker, who was the author and Magnus, who was the artist. The comic was a great success and was marked by a sexy female lead and a Jekyll and Hyde storyline, packed with action and laced with crime.

It was published in stark black and white as a digest and continued for some ten years. In 1968 Piero Vivarelli created a movie using some of the same themes but adapted for the big screen.

Polish model Magda Konopka plays Dr. Marnie Bannister who is working with another scientist to develop a youth serum; she is disfigured as in the comic.

They have successfully developed the serum however it comes with the very dangerous side effect of exaggerating the innate cruelty, violence and aggression within the patient. Dr. Bannister takes the potion and in short order becomes a stunning Euro babe who stabs her fellow scientist to death and begins forming a crime empire !

This is a sexy, Euro Sixties film packed with babes, crime, murder and police investigations. It is especially remembered for the way in which Dr.Bannister does hot strip tease numbers.



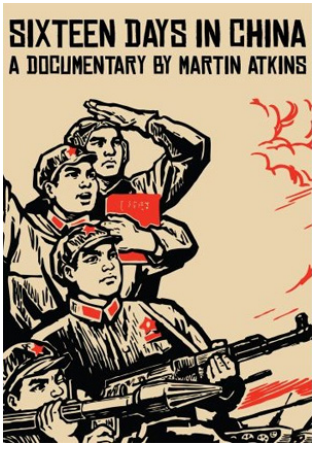
The soundtrack is a superb mix of Sixties jazz, Euro riffs and orchestral pieces. It actually stands the test of time rather well and is still a very strong score. Tracks range from laid back and romantic to jazzy, Middle Eastern mood tracks to free improvisation Sixties sounds.

This is the very first release of the Satanik soundtrack and Beat Records have done a great job !

It sounds superb and comes in a jewel case with a full colour 8-page booklet containing synopsis, background notes, reproductions of lobby cards and images from the movie.

Web: http://www.beatrecords.it

Sixteen Days in China
A Documentary by Martin Atkins
Invisible Records
MVD Visual
All Region DVD
2008



Martin Atkins is/was the demented drummer from groups such as Public Image Limited, Pigface and Nine Inch Nails. Currently he is doing more talking about touring to wannabee musicians, and he is producing for Invisible Records.

He had become tired of the North American music scene and in 2006 he traveled to the Peoples Republic of China to study the music and bands coming from that unlikely source.

He found an interesting range of local groups, some combining traditional singing styles with a

rock backing, others using traditional instruments in their musical mix.

Over three nights at a local club he listened to a number of bands, then tried to coax some of them into signing contracts with Invisible.

He found them surprisingly reluctant to trust anyone involved in the U.S. music industry, and with his budget shot to pieces and time running out it looked as if he would not get a single band into the studio.

Finally he coaxed Snapline to record, and added Carsick Cars, Queen Sea Big Shark, Joyside and others. The final mixes and overdubs were done at Invisible's Chicago studio and issued as the compilation "Look Directly Into The Sun".

A further compilation "China Dub Soundsystem" featured Tibetan instruments and singing styles.

The cover for "Look Directly Into The Sun" was based on an old poster from China's Cultural Revolution. In China, such posters are apparently now regarded as curiosities of some antique value but little else, and irrelevant to the music.

The music itself is not featured strongly in the documentary. Clips are short, but show that the performers have an enthusiasm for their art that is not always matched by their musical ability, but is refreshing in its range of styles.

Some of the bands, it should be noted, are very very good, and I quite enjoyed the clips, brief as they were.

The same cannot be said for Atkins' narration and speech. I am not a prude, but he constantly uses filthy language and this gets a bit tiring. His reaction to the Chinese political situation and censorship is also irrelevant.

Overall I would like to have seen more time devoted to the bands and less to Atkins. Still, he wrote, directed and produced the documentary so I guess he is entitled to his opinions.

If you are interested in trends in music, have a look at this documentary. You could well be hearing more of the bands in the future.

Web: http://www.mvdb2b.com/

Torchwood Original Television Soundtrack
Silva Screen

Australia: The Planet Company

The Torchwood original Television soundtrack offers a contemporary score composed by Ben Foster and Murray Gold. It features a range of musical highlights from Torchwood series One and Two, the highly successful, if not a little eccentric, spin-off series from Doctor Who writer Russell T Davies.

Ben Foster acted as orchestrator and conductor for Murray Gold on Doctor Who and then, went on to co-write with Murray the music for the first two series of Russell T Davies' Torchwood. Ben started his Film and TV career with scoring over 30 short films for various European directors and subsequently writing for a variety of television programmes (Love On A Saturday Night, The Great British Test series for ITV).

He has also worked as the orchestrator for The Hitch Hikers Guide To The Galaxy, The League Of Gentlemen's Apocalypse, and is currently working on The Mummy 3 for Universal.

Murray Gold is best known for his powerful score for Doctor Who which is widely regarded as a major element in the revival of the classic cult series.

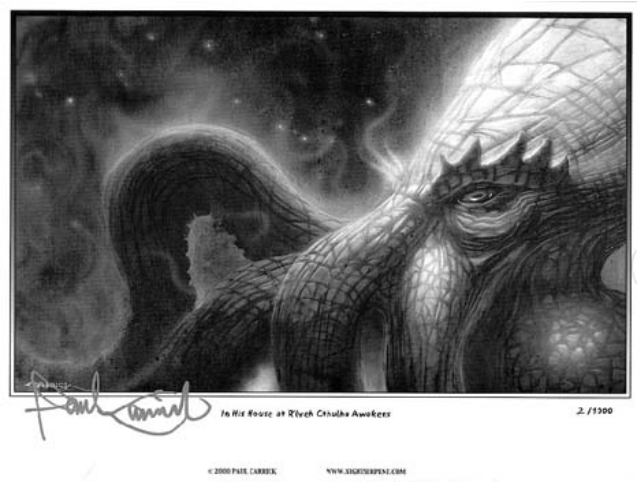
From his ground-breaking, BAFTA-nominated score to Vanity Fair, to the RTS Award-winning soundtrack to Queer as Folk, Murray Gold is one of the more accomplished composers working in television today.

ART & ARTISTS

The Work of Paul Carrick

Paul Carrick is a fascinating artist who explores the darker side of fantasy with an emphasis on the work of H.P. Lovecraft as well as general fantasy and visionary art. His biography outlines his extensive professional experience in design and illustration for books, magazines, card and role playing games coupled with broad fantasy, science fiction, role playing, live-action and gaming experience as well as his educational background in the fine arts, but of course this does not do him justice.

I was initially attracted to Carrick's work through his superb presentation of images related to the dark visions of H.P Lovecraft. Now, sure, Lovecraft is popular today, perhaps too popular and there are artists a dime a dozen creating images of his work.



But there is a "presence" in Carrick's work, his images are refined reflections on dark fantasy and are at times stunning beautiful, at other times brutal and edgy. While involved with RPG (role playing games), his work shows a maturity that goes beyond much of what passes for fantasy art in this field these days, there is a depth to his art and I especially note his use of light and shade to create powerful and memorable images.

One of his best images is that Cthulhu, in my mind it is one of the very best representations of Cthulhu I have seen in print and is extremely evocative. It has a superb octopus like look with markings symbolizing its great age and ancestry, its eye is alien and cold, it seems to stare right through you.

It is available on the Night Serpents website as a professionally printed, signed and limited edition (1,000 copies only. It is supplied polybagged with a cardboard backing to arrive in perfect condition. A quote below the image reads 'In his house at R'lyeh, Cthulhu Awakens'. It is certainly worth getting hold of.

Carrick has a regular blog on his website and is working on a Cthulhu statue and selling casts of it so it is worth keeping an eye on his site and seeing what is has on offer.

His site also includes sample images of a lot of his works including a superb H.P. Lovecraft image gallery.

Web: http://www.nightserpent.com

Dracula and Haunted Realm 2009 Calendars Simon Marsden

Simon Marsden produces quite astounding and beautiful photographs which attempt to embody the mystery which permeates abandoned castles, alleys at night, graveyards and secluded woodlands. For Marsden we have suppressed the sense of “otherness” in the name of science and technology and through his photographs he attempts to communicate his vision of this lost world. His photographs are beautiful and haunting, sometimes tinged with darkness, others filled with light and texture, they are always evocative.

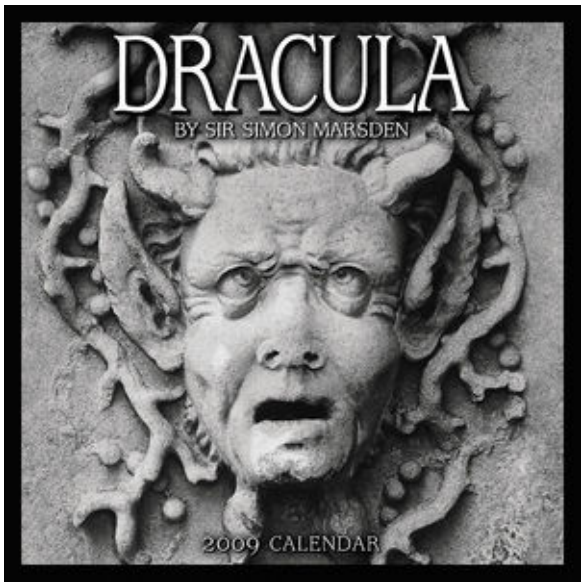
His two calendars for 2009 are superb examples of his work.

Haunted Realm

From the very beginning of recorded time all the great civilizations of our world have believed in the supernatural in some form or other. Simon Marsden’s startlingly atmospheric black and white photographs reveal this hidden world and his ghostly and beguiling images transport the viewer to a different realm. Accompanying the photographs is text which describes the apparitions that have been reported at each site, and the strange and often macabre real-life events which are said to lie behind them. Whether you make of these accounts, the “ presence” of the images are powerful and the work compelling.

Dracula

The vampire, a creature clad in darkness and legend, has haunted man's imagination for centuries. None more so than Dracula, Bram Stoker's fictional count, who leaves a crumbling ancestral castle in his native Transylvania for the shores of Victorian England, seeking out innocent victims in his insatiable thirst for human blood. Universally acclaimed as the most frightening gothic novel ever written, the book is based on the infamous deeds of the real life medieval tyrant Vlad Tepes or "Vlad the Impaler," and the mysterious tales of the strigoi, the Romanian word for the undead.



Sir Simon Marsden, the modern master of gothic images, has sought out and photographed many of the sites associated with both the real and the imagined Dracula. The Dracula 2009 wall calendar features Marsden's evocative photographs accompanied by details of their chilling history and extracts from the novel itself.

"The Vampire lives on," wrote Stoker, "and cannot die by the mere passing of time." This is a superb gift for anyone with an interest in vampires; it not only offers some truly superb photography but includes unique images of key locations related to the Vampire legend with a fascinating and informative text.
Each of these products while certainly useful as calendars are works of art in their own right and are worthwhile as collectibles and photographic collections. While the calendar may become dated, the images are timeless.

These are published by Amber Lotus in the US (http://www.amberlotus.com), but it is certainly recommended that you buy them direct from Simon himself at his website and while you are there have a look at his astounding website. It is packed with all sorts of interesting products including the highly respected Marsden Archive, which specializes in the fantastic and the supernatural and includes Simon Marsden's extraordinary and powerful black and white images which extensively cover the British Isles, Ireland, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Romania and the USA.

Simon Marsden
Web: http://www.simonmarsden.co.uk

COMICS IN REVIEW

Comic Books Unbound
Starz Originals
Anchor Bay 2008
R1 DVD

Comic Books Unbound is an original Starz documentary exploring the interaction between cinema and comic books.

It offers a comprehensive history of the development of comic books from print to the screen from the earliest comic book serials shown at Saturday Matinees through the campy Batman of the Sixties to the success of the first Superman and then the failure and the later demise of the franchise. It then moves on to explore the revival of modern comic book based films from Batman to Spiderman, X-men and Iron Man.

Also examined are graphic novel adaptations such as Sin City, 300, Persepolis and A History of Violence, as well as the newest entries such as The Dark Knight and Hellboy II: The Golden Army.

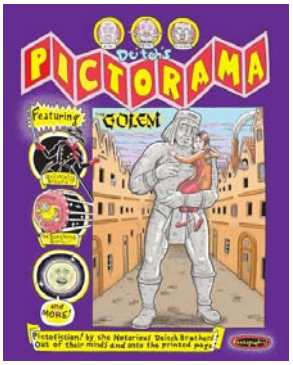
Comic Books Unbound features exclusive interviews with comic book aficionados and luminaries, including actors Robert Downey Jr. (Iron Man), Edward Norton (The Incredible Hulk), Ron Perlman and Selma Blair and writer/director Guillermo Del Toro (the Hellboy films); filmmakers Guillermo Del Toro (Hellboy), Zak Penn (X-Men, X-Men 2), Richard Donner (Superman), Michael Uslan (Batman); comic book experts including Kevin Feige of Marvel Studios, Mike Richardson of Dark Horse Comics and as would be expected, the comic book maestro himself – Stan Lee.

While this documentary is primarily focused on the interaction between comic books and cinema, we are also treated to a brief history of comic books themselves moving from newspaper comics to print serials with a special discussion of issues relating to censorship and the development of the comic book code. There is also a discussion of comic book culture from mainstream to underground as well as the role of comic book conventions in the industry.

Comic Books Unbound is a superb documentary and includes some very rare footage, lots of interviews and some great background information. It even documents the legendary Fantastic Four film by Roger Corman which is still locked away in a well known studios archives marked “never to be released” !

The bonus features are Interview outtakes.

Deitch’s Pictorama
Fantagraphics 2008



Deitch’s Pictorama is a new type of graphic fiction. While it has graphic art throughout, it offers a mixture of text, handwritten text, cartoons, illustrations and other styles.

It is quite an innovative format and not only includes fiction from Kim Deitch but from his whole rather creative clan. The book opens with an introduction from the Academy Award-winning animator, cartoonist and illustrator Gene Deitch (of Tom and Jerry fame), who happens to be the father of the trio.

The first tale is Kim’s “The Sunshine Girl” which explores a brother and sister's obsession with collecting bottle caps. Along the way exploring the mentality of the collector and ultimately leading into the author's own late-'60s artistic development with a decided psychedelic feel.

"The Golem " written by Seth and decorated with a series of superb pencil illustrations by Simon is a prose novella about the mythical Jewish creature. It is packed with fascinating history, mythology and folklore and is an astounding piece.

“Unlikely Hours” is a conspiracy tale which is dark and paranoid exploring sentient rats. It is written by Seth and illustrated by Kim.

The stories in this volume are fascinating as they mix a lot more fiction that found in a traditional graphic art volume and this combination of very strong and intriguing fiction mixed with superb illustration makes this quite an unusual volume.

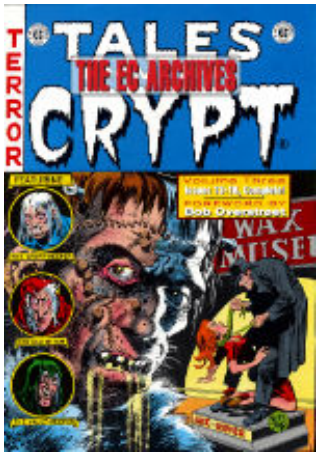
Next we have Seth’s short story “Children of Aruf”, about a man and his dog, but this has tale has a twist; it is set in a world where dogs talk.

Kim wraps with "The Cop on the Beat, the Man in the Moon and Me," and is an autobiographical piece.

This "picto-fiction" pocket book is a delight to both read and see and offers a superb array of fiction and graphic art. There are all sorts of different forms of fiction as well as different artistic styles, from the fine pencil work of The Golem to traditional comic style, it is presented in a nice pocket book size with a great colour cover and high quality printing.

Web: http://www.fantagraphics.com

The EC Archives
Vault of Horror
Volume 1
Tales from the Crypt
Volume 3
Gemstone Publishing



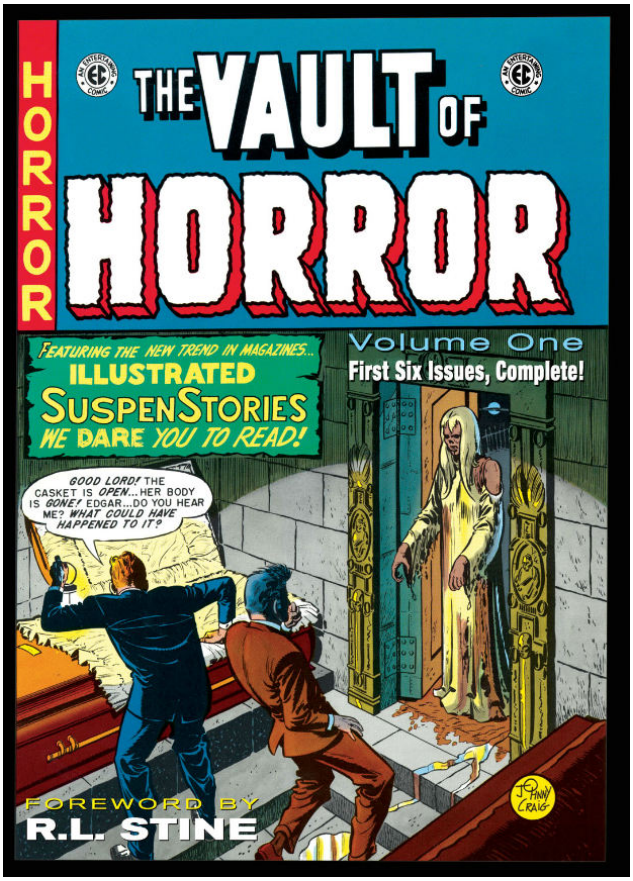
The history of EC Comics is a fascinating one. It originally began as Educational Comics and was founded by Max Gaines, former editor of the comic book company All-American Publications. It merged with DC Comics in 1944 with the plan to market comics about science, history and the Bible to schools and churches!

After his accidental death in 1949, his son William began to refocus the company, it moved away from traditional comic book fare such as westerns and romance and focused in on Science Fiction and Horror. Throughout the 1950’s EC produced an amazing array of high quality and innovative product and indeed many still consider this period to be the golden age of comic books both in terms of style and creative content.

EC however, began to run into problems with censorship. As had happened with cinema earlier, conservative elements were manipulated by politicians looking for a band wagon to use for electioneering and soon a furore exploded over comic book content.

In 1954 this was exasperated by the publication of “The Seduction of the Innocent” by Dr.Frederic Wertham, this was an inflammatory and ill researched book by a narrow and puritan psychiatrist who pinned all the ills of the Fifties on the effect of comic books. (Much akin to later crusades against violent films and computer games). Wertham’s work was controversial and biased but feed into the general fear of the changes which were slowly taking place within Fifties society and indeed led to the revolution of the Sixties.

This fear was so extreme that comics books were an easy target and the hysteria even led to a full congressional investigation and lots of talk about enforcing censorship.



The comic book industry reacted with fear and paranoia and rather than battle against such an infringement of the freedom of the press buckled under pressure and developed their censorship code and an authority to enforce it (The Comic Code Authority). Since the major community fear was about Science Fiction, Horror and Crime comics this authority and its code literally destroyed the science fiction and horror comic book industry overnight.

EC battled on for a short time, but in the end focused on its surviving publication, MAD magazine and even it had some problems.

The EC Comics from the early Fifties such as Vault of Horror and Tales of the Crypt were superb examples of comic book storytelling. They were artistically superb, had compelling plots and were exceptional publications in every possible way.

They triggered such a response from the general populace because they were, in so many ways, ahead of their times in the subjects they covered and the way they presented a story.

These comics have, of course, now become rare collector's items and Gemstone Publishing have done us all a great service by reprinting the series in quite superb editions. For example, Vault of Horror Volume 1 reprints the first six complete issues (24 stories) of the series in full colour with significant historical notes. While Tales from the Crypt Volume 3 includes Issues #13-18 are reprinted with 24 stories written and illustrated by the likes of Bill Gaines, Al Feldstein, Jack Davis, Jack Kamen, Graham Ingels, Al Williamson, Joe Orlando and George Evans.

These books are of the highest quality, they are superb hard-covers which have been printed to the highest standard. The comics are reprinted the same size as the original editions and the historical notes are significant and relevant, putting the comics in context. While there has been some controversy over the use of colour (I can hear the purists complaining) I find the colouring of these comics brings them to life and helps them communicate for a new generation. The colours are clear, nicely used and appropriate, they certainly do not detract from the authenticity of these reprints, indeed I think they add to the unique quality of these publications.

These are superb volumes, beautifully produced, lovingly commentated and a very reasonable price. They will make a superb addition to any comic book lover's library.

Gemstone Publishing
Web: http://www.gemstonepub.com/

Love and Rockets
New Stories #1
The Hernandez Brothers
Graphic Novel
100 Pages
Colour Cover, Black and White.
Fantagraphics Books 2008

The Hernandez Brothers are highly respected independent comic book artists who together developed the comic series Love and Rockets. These were highly successful and ran to issue 50 when each went on to develop individual projects. However, as time progressed they found that Love and Rockets had a special significance to their creative life and returned to releasing it.

It is amazing to think that Love and Rockets has been around for some 27 years - the first was magazine-sized and started in 1981 slowly moving to comic book style and then the second was the re-launch of the comic in 2001 for the twentieth anniversary. The New Stories of Love and Rockets are now being produced in a new format, an annual graphic novel.

Jaime launches the new format with a fantastic tale, a return to the origins of comics with a new twist on the super-hero story! Maggie's long time friend Penny Century has finally realized her dream of acquiring super-powers, but at a shocking personal cost. Now she rampages through the galaxy, half mad with grief, and a

motley group of super-heroes assembles to try to stop her -- led by Maggie's girlfriend Angel and her mysterious neighbour Alarma, and involving a number of characters that readers of the original Love and Rockets fans will delight in recognizing. The epic-length 50-page story (only the first half of the saga!) combines Jaime's razor sharp characterization and superlative art with wildly inventive, Kirby-style slam-bang super-hero action.

I especially like the way in which the super-heros have both more than human powers and abilities and yet at the same time are emotionally “all too human”, this creative balance between science fiction and fantasy and real life concerns makes this story especially successful.

Then Gilbert Hernandez explodes with a similarly generous helping of his fantastically creative and innovative short stories, which seem to create a certain morality and then destroy it. These range from the fantastic to the cerebral, to the decidedly surreal in Never Say Never which reflects on sex and money through the medium of a tale about a kangaroo who gets lucky in Las Vegas.

This is a superbly produced volume is a great way to experience the brilliance of Jaime, Gilbert and Mario Hernandez, it will be a thrill for old fans who adored Love and Rockets and will introduce a new generation to their work in a new and exciting manner.

While many comic book lovers focus on the underground comics of the Seventies this series which started in the Eighties and now is being continued today has a lot to offer and is well worth experiencing.

Web: http://www.fantagraphics.com

TOYS & COLLECTIBLES

Playing Gods
Board Game
Web: http://www.playinggods.com

"The earthly and divine realms meet in Playing Gods. Whether wreaking disasters of biblical proportions on innocent populations or bestowing providence and goodwill, the gods have ever made sport of humans. Though imbued with amazing powers, the gods are jealous. (It's no coincidence that the very first of the Ten Commandments is "You shall have no other gods before me.") Other gods, with their silly miracles and ridiculous beliefs, diminish the glory and importance of the one true god-or so each of them believes!"

"Enact the religious struggles ripped from today's headlines with Moses, Jesus, and others, or step back in time to don the mantle of the Norse ruler Odin, the Roman god Mars, the Celtic warrior Morrigan, or Kali the Hindu god. Wiccans can battle Scientologists and ancient Mayan gods for control over the world... the only limit is your imagination. Unleash floods and plagues on each other's followers, while protecting your own flock. The god with the best strategy, skill, and luck shall rule the world..."

Playing Gods is a satirical board game of divine domination. Two to five players each play a different god and compete with each other to take over the world. This is done by increasing your believers, converting the followers of other gods or smiting them with Acts of God. It is very fun to play, has a great sense of humour and has an open-ended structure that encourages player creativity. For example, players may choose to be a figurehead of one of the five main religions, or they may choose to create their own gods – or even be their own god! In the Expansion Pack, artistic and creative players may even write and design their own cards.

The game itself is beautifully manufactured with some of the nicest pawns I have ever seen in the board game. They are very high quality and certainly better than those in mass market products.

However, if you want to go a step further, there are official Playing Gods Limited Edition Idols which are sold separately. These Limited Edition Idols are made in the USA and come hand-cast in hard resin. They are nearly three inches tall and highly detailed. Because they are cast and finished by hand, they are more expensive to produce than the injection-moulded deluxe pawns and will only have a limited production run.

They are suitable for painting or just putting on your desk to watch the world's gods fight it out. They are quite stunning and in somewhere between pawns for use in the game and RPG figures, paint them, display them or use them. The raging Jesus with a Cross and the Kali figure as especially impressive.

Playing Gods is also very simple to play. The superbly produced colour board is a simplified map of the Earth, with five continents each containing four regions. (Much like the primitive model of the world which was held to be true by various world religions prior to modern science). Coloured chips representing sects are placed on those regions.

Circling around the globe is an outer ring where the gods move around the board, gathering power through Wrath and Conversion cards. Wrath cards (also ominously called "kill cards") are used to bring down Acts of Gods and natural disasters, while the Conversion cards are used to convert other gods' followers to your beliefs.

The game ends when one god has either killed or converted all other gods' sects, or has spread followers to occupy more than the eleven regions which occupy half the world.

Playing Gods has a lot going for it. It is superbly made, offers a high quality board and pawns, has great game play and comes with a smart, cynical and satirical tone. The Wrath and Conversion cards are amusing but also make you think about the inherent violence in religion and superstition.

At the same time it doesn't just poke fun at the major religions, there are stickers for making tokens to use of you want to play as anything from Scientology to Pastafarianism, and anything in between, so everyone can get a serve !

The Playing Gods Expansion Pack comes with thirty deluxe cards specific to the five major religions—they delve deeply into the nature of each religion and in many ways show their innate ludicrousness and insanity !

They provide special attacks and defences based on each religion's characteristics, and are easily incorporated into the existing rules and card decks. They are a nice addition and take the game even further.

Playing Gods is blasphemy with style and offers a great board game with a good dose of insight and a great load of fun !

Shocker Toys

Shocker Toys is happy to announce an alliance with many major Independent comic book creators to distribute a full fan-driven Independent comic book action figure line. Shocker Toy's expertly crafted, articulated and highly sought-after Indie Spotlight comic book heroes toys.

Indie Spotlight Comic Book Heroes: Series 1

The Shocker Toy's 6-inch scale figures of ShadowHawk, SCUD, Kabuki, Katchoo and The Maxx. Made of sturdy plastics and hyper-articulated joints, these figures can be posed in many ways. Each comes with extra hands, accessories, comics or posters and an Isz from the Maxx's world. Collect all 7 figures and their UPC's to mail away for a Mr. Gone figure, the sinister dark enemy of The Maxx.

Series 1 breakdown:

The Maxx: 1 Figure, 1 Headress, 1 Poster, 1 Pink fairy isz, 1 Black Isz, 1 White Isz
Kabuki: 1 Figure, 2 Hands w/sickles, 1 Poster, 1 Pink fairy Isz
Katchoo: 1 Figure, 2 Hands w/9mm, 1 Poster, 1 Pink fairy Isz
Scud: 1 Figure, 2 Hands w/11mm, 1 Poster, 1 White Isz
ShadowHawk:1 Figure, Grapple hook, 1 Poster, 1 White Isz
SOL (Scud Variant): 1 Figure, 1 Poster, 1 Black Isz
ShadowHawk (Variant Black Costume): 1 Figure, Grapple hook, 1 Poster, 1 Black Isz

Indie Spotlight Comic Book Heroes: Series 2

The Tick, Dick Tracy, Ignacia (WildGuard), Jack Staff and Zombie King (Deadworld) The mail away for this line will be the Tick's sidekick Arthur.

Also featured in the series will be posters, comics, great accessories and Tick themed accessories spread out through each figure in the assortment.

Just a few of the series are shown here, visit the website for full details. This is an amazing new series of products and certainly worth seeing. They are also very reasonably priced and, of course, very well made !

Web: http://www.shockertoys.com

Roadkill Plush Toys
Web: http://www.roadkilltoys.com

Splodge is a common-all-garden hedgehog, Erinaceus Europaeus. He was born near Watford, in Hertfordshire, to Nigel and Sally Hedgehog. He was educated at Herts College, where he took an NVQ in joinery.

Splodge was very popular in the hedgerows of Hertfordshire, and he will be sorely missed by his next of kin, Pop the Weasel. He met his untimely end at the wheels of Jensen Button's Formula 1 Honda, on a warm-up lap at Silverstone racetrack.

Splodge the Hedgehog has been released by Roadkill Toys in a first run of only 500 limited edition toys. Each one will have a special toe tag handwritten by the designer, and will have a limited edition number on the tag. Each one will be different - some are flattened on the M25, some on the B43. Some are squished by combine harvesters, and some by kebab vans.

Only the first 500 have these, so don't hang around sitting on your stools. (And you better buy one, because the poor designer now has Repetitive Strain Injury and has to pay his medical bills).

Starting with Splodge the Hedgehog, Roadkill are also including Death Certificates and Bumper Stickers in each package. Every item will have their own blood-stained death certificate, signed by a doctor, and will also come with an 'I love Roadkill' bumper sticker.

Splodge's body is stuffed with a mixture of beads and stuffing. The beads give the Squash -plush teddy a bit of extra weight, so he can lie spread-eagled in his blood and gut-pool. The blood and guts and gore are made using the latest, cutting edge stuffing.

It's a special new micro-bead stuffing that gives the guts and organs a more malleable, tactile effect. It makes it more squidgy. More gross-out. You can disembowel Splodge by pulling the blood and innards through the zips that line both sides of the teddy carcass.

The underbody and legs and head are made from specially sourced Squash-plush material. It's a really good quality Korean fur, and it gives the teddy a convincingly mangy pelt. The plush for the spikes is also specially sourced. It gives a spikey, but soft quality.

The Gut-plush is a stretchy thin material that squidges and bulges under your fingers. If you've ever squidged a Japanese Barbapapa plush toy, then you'll know what we mean. And the claws that protrude from each of his four grasping paws are made of felt.

His left eye is plastic. The right hand one is closed and hooded by plush eyelids. His nose is also plastic. Streaked across his face and right front paw there's a tyre print painted on. The effect gives quite a realistic tyre residue.

Flip him over and on his underbelly there's an embroidered red blood splat.

In the middle of this blood splat, there are a couple of embroidered organs. From what we know about Hedgehog anatomy, it looks like a pancreas and a bladder. And all of his features are fully safety compliant.

In the middle of this blood splat, there are a couple of embroidered organs. From what we know about Hedgehog anatomy, it looks like a pancreas and a bladder. And all of his features are fully safety compliant.

He measures a statuesque 23 cms from nose to tail, and 21 cms from outstretched paw to paw. And in the middle he flattens out to 13 cms high with the blood and guts stuffed in, and 11 cms high with them out. At 300 grams he's slightly overweight for a hedgehog. This is due to his unhealthy obsession with bread and milk.

The teddy body-bag is made from an translucent plastic so you can see the gore inside. It has a white zipper down the middle. And it's 27 cms long by 20 wide. With a bit of prodding and pounding, it just allows enough space for a run over hedgehog.

The toe tag is made out of recycled brown card. It's attached to the toe with string. And there's even a sew-in instruction label that's crusted with blood and gore.

Splodge is the latest plush toy from Roadkill Toys and is a macabre joy !

It is so utterly realistic it is astounding, its pelt is so lush and lifelike it makes you cringe with delight. It is beautifully designed with a obvious eye for detail, with such extras as death certificate, tags, body bag etc. It is a true collectible and would be the ultimate Xmas gift !

COMING NEXT ISSUE !

Special Feature on World Cinema

Issue out Late February/Early March

Feature on New Zealand Cinema from Classics to Peter Jackson !

Reviews of "Beginners Guide to World Cinema" Series from Madman Entertainment.

From Giallo to Asian Horror, Classic World cinema to cult films from the around.

Lots of reviews of Books and DVDs with a special focus on World Cinema.

CARL LAEMMLE *presents*

FRANKENSTEIN

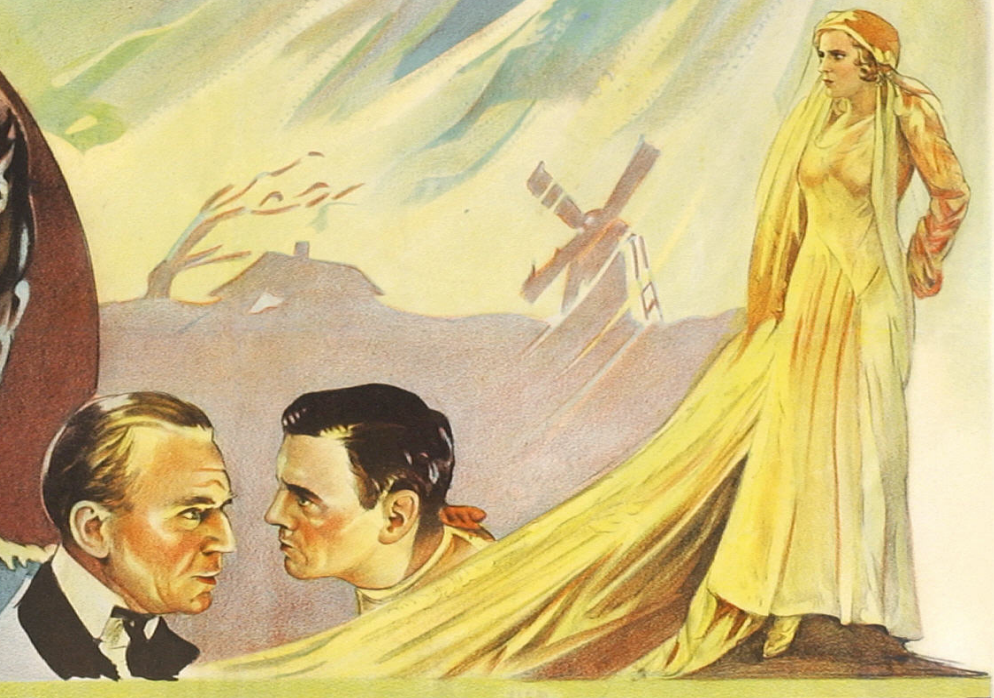
THE MAN WHO MADE A MONSTER

with

COLIN CLIVE, MAE CLARKE,
JOHN BOLES, BORIS KARLOFF,
DWIGHT FRYE, EDW. VAN SLOAN & FREDERIC KERR

Based upon the
Mary Wollstonecroft Shelley Story

Adapted by John L. Balderston
from the play by Peggy Webling



DIRECTED BY JAMES WHALE

A UNIVERSAL PICTURE

PRODUCED BY CARL LAEMMLE, JR.

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